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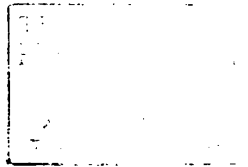
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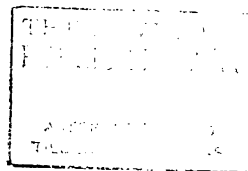


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THE YALE UNIVERSITY DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION.
1907.

THE PRETENDERS

BY

HENRIK IBSEN

ACTING VERSION

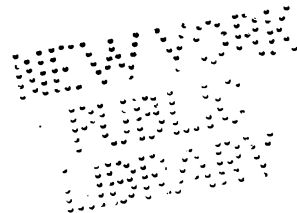
OF

THE YALE UNIVERSITY
DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

By WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

Lampson Professor of English Literature at Yale University

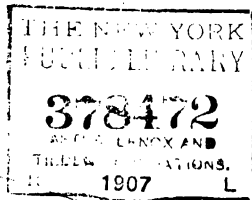


NEW HAVEN

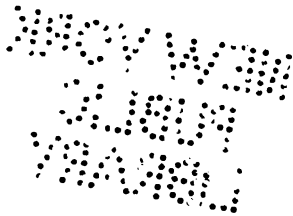
PUBLISHED UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

DWIGHT RAYMOND MEIGS, 1907

A.L. . . .



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THE TUTTLE, MOREHOUSE & TAYLOR COMPANY,
NEW HAVEN, CONN.

PREFACE.

By the kind permission of Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons, the text of this acting version is based upon their copyright edition of the *Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen*, translated into English by William Archer. The Yale Dramatic Association takes this opportunity to thank Mr. Charles Scribner for his courtesy and kindness.

HISTORY OF THE Yale University Dramatic Association

The Yale Dramatic Association was founded by Harry D. Wescott, of the class of 1901. This simple statement of fact gives a very faint idea of the tremendous enthusiasm, energy, and capacity for hard work displayed by the founder. He belonged in college to that somewhat numerous class of students who have a positive genius for learning anything and everything except their lessons. His extra-curriculum activities in literature and athletics were manifold, but his heart was in dramatics. He could hardly have chosen a more unpropitious time to propagate his Idea. The Joint-Junior-Fraternity-Farces had proved a total waste of time and money, and had been recently annihilated by Faculty edict. The Yale student body—always heavily conservative—were opposed to any new dramatic scheme. But Mr. Wescott loved a fight against big odds. In the autumn of 1899, he summoned what he called “a committee of enthusiastic speculators,” consisting of John Penn Brock, Shiras Campbell, Ezekiel Bronson, of the class of 1900, and Cyrus Field, of the Medical School, and broached the scheme of a Yale Dramatic Association. A notice appeared in the Yale “News,” inviting all interested to attend a public meeting. About fifty men responded,

and gathered in the rear room of old Lyceum, where President Woolsey used to lecture, and where Chaucer and the Elizabethan Drama—the first literary quarry of the Association—were being taught. Mr. Wescott set forth the aims and ideals of the putative club. It was to be radically different from the dramatic societies in vogue at Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Columbia. No local farce or musical extravaganza was to be tolerated. The Association would produce only dramas of great literary value, and only those which were seldom or never played on the regular professional stage. The Club would therefore be a powerful ally of the English Department, and would receive the cordial support of the Faculty. The Dean of the College—Henry P. Wright—gave Mr. Wescott every encouragement, and after much discussion, and the surmounting of apparently insurmountable obstacles, the first performance of the Yale Dramatic Association took place in the Hyperion Theatre, New Haven, Wednesday, the 23d May, 1900. It was a double bill; first came Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, dramatised by Mr. Wescott, followed by the Mystery Play, *Secunda Pastorum*. The most thrillingly dramatic of all Chaucer's narratives produced a wonderful effect on the boards, acted as it was with an earnestness and sincerity that more than atoned for technical shortcomings.

In the course of the rehearsals, it had become glaringly evident that a professional coach must be secured, and recourse was had to Mr. Franklin Sargent, President of the American Academy of the Dramatic Arts, at New York City. No account of the Yale Dramatic Association would be complete without a due tribute to this man. It was his production of Ben Jonson's *Silent Woman* at his

academy in 1895 that gave the inspiration and example to universities and colleges all over the United States, and was the direct cause of the Elizabethan and other "revivals" that have since become so common. The annual presentation at Harvard of an Elizabethan play, the staging of *The Case is Altered* at Chicago, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* at Butler College, Indianapolis, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* in California, to mention only a very few,—they all date back to that memorable blizzardous winter evening in 1895, when Mr. Sargent produced *The Silent Woman*. In that performance a young actor, Frank Lea Short, played the rôle of "Truewit." When Mr. Wescott and his friends interviewed Mr. Sargent, he referred them to this young gentleman, who was to be the Walter Camp of Yale Dramatics. Mr. Short possesses the rather unusual combination of volcanic energy with consummate tact. On windless days, his coaching can plainly be heard in the suburbs; but although he has repeatedly exhausted the adjectival resources of the English language in giving ambitious Yale Thespians what he considers a true appraisal of their worth, he has no enemies among his victims. Without Mr. Sargent's example, and Mr. Short's coaching, it is depressing to think what might have happened to the Yale Dramatic Association; but as "Touchstone" says, "you may avoid that too, with an 'if' much virtue in 'if.'"

Mr. Franklin Sargent, with Mr. Short as lieutenant, had successfully staged the *Secunda Pastorum* in the Empire Theatre, one Lenten afternoon; and it was his experience in this particular work that emboldened the fiery coach to attempt it with the Yale undergraduates. No one who was present at the Yale performance will ever forget that

mediaeval Pageant as it rolled onto the old Hyperion stage, nor the curiosity and excitement it aroused among the audience. From the literary and dramatic point of view, the evening was a prodigious success, and the future of the Association seemed secure. Then came the morning after, and a deficit of four hundred dollars! Mr. Wescott was obliged to call on Professor Beebe, the Chairman of the Entertainment Committee, and display his balance-sheet. What followed may be told in the culprit's own words:—"Professor Beebe is a mathematician. I had to show him figures; and when I placed the trial balance sheet, or rather dropped it like a red-hot coal, I had a chill! He calmly reviewed it, drew forth from a drawer in his desk a piece of cardboard on which he wrote some words that I had not the courage to look upon until I had reached the middle of the campus. I will merely state that it was an order on the Yale National Bank for the total sum of our indebtedness." It is safe to add that no member of the Yale Dramatic Association will ever forget the kindness of Professor Beebe. The officers of the organization the first year were Thomas B. Clarke, Jr., President, and Harry D. Wescott, Manager.

The second performance was given in the Hyperion Theatre on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, the 23d and 24th April, 1901, and the play selected was Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West, Part I.* The 23d April was selected because it was Shakspeare's birthday, and the play was presented for the first time on any stage in America. Harvard University kindly loaned the Elizabethan scenery that had been used in Cambridge for the production of *The Silent Woman*, and also for Professor Barrett Wendell's original play, *Raleigh in Guiana.* *The Fair Maid*

of the *West*, with Mr. Short once more as coach, was given in the Elizabethan manner, with gallants on the stage, and an Elizabethan rough-house in the pit. The occasion was made memorable by the début of a sophomore, Mr. Erastus Corning, who is beyond all doubt the finest actor ever discovered among Yale undergraduates. On the second night, a large loving cup was presented to Mr. Short, but his speech in acceptance could not be heard beyond the first two rows of the orchestra chairs. He had used up the ruins of a great voice in coaching. In the tavern scenes, the splendid old drinking song, from *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, was sung, the music being adapted from an old Elizabethan air. Many professors from other colleges witnessed these two performances, and were unanimous in their verdict. The President of the Association this year was Willard D. Howe, and Mr. Wescott was again the Manager. The press notices of the production, both in New York and in New Haven papers, were all enthusiastic; but behind the horseman sat Black Care, in the shape of a large deficit. With the help of some members of the Faculty, and a generous donation from the manager's father, Judge Wescott, the gulf was once more bridged. During this academic year the Association was addressed by Mr. Franklin Sargent, and by Mr. Heinrich Conried, who has so generously produced German plays at New Haven. The latter gentleman was laboring under the delusion that the Yale Dramatic Association was bent on giving foolish farces and ballet dances, and was greatly relieved when he met and talked with the students.

The next great event came in the autumn of 1901, during the Bicentennial Celebration of Yale University. With Mr. Short as coach, the Association gave in the open air,

on the evening of the 2d October, before an audience of eight thousand Yalensians, a series of ten short plays, illustrating events in the history of Yale from its founding down to the twentieth century. The scenes were set in the following order, on a huge stage:—

1. Founding of the College School, 1701;
2. Removal from Saybrook, 1718;
3. Washington at Yale, 1775;
4. Execution of Nathan Hale, 1776;
5. Freshman Society Initiation, 1850-60;
6. Burial of Euclid, 1857;
7. The Fence, 1870-80;
8. The Fence at Night, 1880-90;
9. College Room, October, 1901;
10. College Chapel.

Clever prologues, written by Professor Edward B. Reed, were recited before each play by Erastus Corning, whose enunciation was so distinct that every word was audible to the most distant listener in the mighty host. The expense of the whole production was borne by the Yale Corporation.

Shakspeare's birthday was once more observed in the Spring of 1902. On the nights of the 23d and the 24th April the Association presented a double bill, *High Life Below Stairs* (1759) by the Rev. James Townley, and *The Critic* (1779), by Sheridan. Mr. Short was the coach. By this time the Yale Dramatic Association had become a powerful and influential club, and the attitude of the students had entirely changed. Elections to office in the organization were eagerly sought and prized, and the competition for membership was keen and fierce. *The Critic*, with Mr. Corning as "Puff," was an enormous success. I

do not believe that a better undergraduate performance has ever been seen at Yale. It was interesting not only to the Faculty and to specialists; it delighted the whole audience, and by many was said to be the most entertaining play of any kind that had graced the Hyperion boards. There was no mere ripple of polite, sympathetic mirth; the farcical scenes were greeted by uncontrollable roars of laughter. The President of the Association this year was Malcolm Moore, and the Manager—perhaps the shrewdest manager the Association has ever had—was Mr. Franklin Johnston, now with the Ben Greet company. His supreme achievement was in making the receipts exceed the expenses. I quote from a letter by Mr. Moore:—

“We, in a financial way, started that year some four hundred dollars behind; but by the strictest economy, we were able to give our productions for an entire cost of one thousand, six hundred and ten dollars. Our receipts for the two nights were one thousand, seven hundred twenty-five dollars and seventy-five cents; so, for the first time, the Association made money above its expenses. Looking over some of my papers yesterday, I found a receipt in full from Professor S. S. Sanford for one hundred dollars on account of a note which I had given him as president of the Association. I cite this incident to show you to what straits we were reduced. You must remember that, inasmuch as we started in debt, our credit was pretty rotten.”

Mr. Wescott had first conceived the idea of having permanent headquarters for the Association; and during its early stages, a room in Warner Hall had been engaged and fitted up by him. When Mr. Johnston became manager, in addition to innumerable other ways in which he

helped the organization, he succeeded in securing from the Corporation a permanent abiding-place. A large room in the basement of Osborn Hall was set aside, and has been used ever since, both for meetings and first rehearsals. This will probably remain the local centre, until the dream of the Association is realized, and a Yale Theatre built.

During the year 1901-2, at the request of the University of Chicago, a copy of the Constitution of the Yale Dramatic Association was forwarded to that city, and the great western University proceeded to organize on Yale lines. Since that time, other colleges have followed suit, so that The Yale Dramatic Association is the parent of several lusty children. Occasionally, too, other projects have been taken up. During the consulship of Corning and Johnston, Ben Greet's company came to New Haven, and gave two out-of-door performances, which were successfully managed by the Yale students in the organization, under the capable direction of the Manager.

The policy of the Association was now to give in succeeding years plays that should represent the complete history of the English drama from its origin down to the end of the nineteenth century. A Mystery play had been presented, followed by an Elizabethan performance; then came Townley's farce, illustrating the middle of the eighteenth century; and for the Spring of 1903, the Association elected to present Goldsmith's seldom-acted comedy, *The Good-Natured Man*. The dates chosen were Monday and Tuesday, the 27th and 28th April, 1903. Mr. Short was again the efficient coach. This year Mr. Erastus Corning was President, and Mr. Franklin Johnston was once more Manager. I quote from a letter lately written by Mr. Corning:—

"I have forgotten who suggested the idea of copying one of the old-time playbills, but it resulted in a trip to New York with a letter of introduction to Mr. Evert Jansen Wendell, whose collection of playbills and other theatrical antiquities was immediately placed at our disposal. After a very interesting afternoon we had failed to come upon any playbill of *The Good-Natured Man*, but we had found several of other plays presented in the same theatre (Covent Garden) and during the same year that *The Good-Natured Man* had been produced. These Mr. Wendell actually loaned to us and permitted us to carry bodily away! We next found an enthusiastic printer in New Haven, one J. Kiernan, Esq., whose name should go down to posterity. It appeared that the quality of the paper on which the old bills were printed could only be imitated by sprinkling modern newspaper paper with water and then allowing it to dry. This imparted to it a mysterious and very ancient crackle which was most desirable. But, he informed us, each sheet had to be sprinkled separately and by hand. The joke of it was that he actually did it. When they were finally printed we felt rather proud of them. And the only criticism one way or the other that I ever heard of them from outside was a careless remark to the effect that 'the programmes were good evidence that we were trying to save money.'

"When the smoke of the performance had cleared away, Frank Johnston announced that we had wiped out the deficit of the preceding year and had a few cents to put in the bank—\$125 or \$150, I think. This I then regarded, and still do, as the most significant achievement of that year. I do not mean by this that I feel in any way that the Association should ever exist as a money-making institution solely, but we should feel for all time the pressing and immediate necessity of cutting our fustian to fit our fortune—of only giving three-act, five-character plays as long as we owe for last year's wigs, and not allow the choruses of Yale students, milkmaids, villagers and courtiers to leap down center until we can support them in the style to which they have been accustomed."

In the Spring of 1904, the Association determined to carry on the historical idea, and selected a play illustrating the efforts of the middle of the nineteenth century, *New Men and Old Acres*, by Tom Taylor and A. D. Dubourg. A new departure was made in a change of coach, and Mr. John Malone, an actor who had supported Salvini and Booth, was invited to train the players. He gave the Yale men a fine technique, but he lacked the enthusiasm and energy displayed by Mr. Short. The performances took place on the evenings of the 19th and 20th April, 1904, and although the acting was exceedingly good, the play was dull, and failed to interest the audience. The result was that the Association was threatened with financial ruin. A deficit of about five hundred dollars was declared. The immediate embarrassment was relieved by a loan on a note, which was paid off the following season. This was a lean year for the organization, but great credit should be given [fortunately it was] to the officers, who worked faithfully under peculiarly trying circumstances. Mr. Edgar Munson was President, and Mr. George W. Adams Manager.

The historical cycle now lacked one contemporary play to make it complete, and it was accordingly voted to produce in the Spring of 1905 a comedy by Pinero. After much discussion, *The Magistrate* was chosen; and active rehearsals began under the direction of Mr. Malone. Financial straits made a change in the policy of the Association imperative; and the Faculty granted permission for a New York performance, which was a social and financial success. On the nights of the 4th and 5th April, 1905, the play was acted before very large audiences in the Hyperion Theatre, New Haven, and on the 7th April at the Carnegie Lyceum, New York City. Mr. Buell Hollister was the President





FRANK LEA SHORT,
Stage Director.

of the Association this year, and also completed his fourth season of acting women's rôles. He was one of the most faithful and efficient officers the Association has had, and in addition to his other duties, was the head coach of the French play performed at New Haven during his Senior year. The *Cercle Français* of the University owes much to the Yale Dramatic Association, Mr. Corning, Mr. Johnston, and others, having often assisted in the acting and management of the French representations. The Manager of the Association this year was Mr. James Hogan, and the Manager of the New York performance Mr. Joseph B. Thomas, Jr., an alumnus of extraordinary business capacity. The New York presentation put the organization entirely out of debt, and left a goodly balance in the treasury.

By 1906, as we have seen, the historical cycle was complete; and it was voted to return to the spacious times of Elizabeth, and attempt *King Henry IV, Part I.* This splendid drama so rarely holds the boards that it is doubtful if any undergraduate had ever witnessed it. It was therefore exactly in line with the original policy of the Association, which was to produce plays of great literary value, neglected by professionals. Mr. Short was induced to return as coach, and received a joyful welcome. This performance was the most ambitious attempt ever made by the organization, and very expensive as well, for the costumes required were exceedingly costly. The difficult matter of proper scenery and appurtenances was settled through the generosity of David Belasco, Shubert Brothers, and Liebler & Co., of New York, who loaned curtains, scenery, and some of the armor. Besides training the star actors, Mr. Short had to manage "armies" of eighty student supers; and here his qualities of generalship had a



THE PRETENDERS.

This drama has never been produced in America and is seldom seen on the European stage. Nevertheless, it is one of the Master's greatest works, and many critics believe that it will outlive his more popular realistic plays. Paul Ernst, a German authority on Ibsen, declares himself as follows:—"This piece is not merely the most important among all the earlier dramas. I, for my part, do not hesitate to say that it deserves to stand first in all the poet's works. It has tragic greatness in the highest sense of the word." The fact that Bernard Shaw omits this play entirely in his account of Ibsen's dramas is also a point in its favor.

Mr. William Archer, in his introduction to the Scribner's copyright edition of Ibsen, says, "The six years that elapsed between *The Vikings* and *The Pretenders* placed him at the height of his intellectual power. . . . The criticism of life, too, which in *The Vikings* is purely sentimental, here becomes intense and searching. . . . With this play, . . . Ibsen took his place among the great dramatists of the world. In wealth of characterization, complexity and nobility of emotion, and depth of spiritual insight, it stands high among the masterpieces of romantic drama."

It is certainly unfortunate that the majority of American readers and theatre-goers know Ibsen only as the author of

A Doll's House and *Ghosts*, for no one can read *The Pretenders* without feeling the mighty genius of its author. The Yale Dramatic Association is performing a real service in presenting, for the first time on any American stage, this splendid masterpiece, so full of thrilling scenes, written in so noble a style, and displaying so extraordinary skill in the analysis of the human heart. "Bishop Nicholas" alone would be enough to make the play unforgettable.

The Pretenders was produced originally at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, on the 11th January, 1871.

William Lyon Phelps.

THE YALE UNIVERSITY DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION.

(Founded February 28th, 1900, by Henry D. Wescott.)

OFFICERS.

President,

CHARLES ROBERTS HOPKINS, 1907.

Vice President,

THOMAS ACHELIS, 1908.

Secretary,

ALEXANDER CUSHING BROWN, 1907.

Treasurer,

SIDNEY ROLLINS OVERALL, 1908.

Manager,

PHILIP LYNDON DODGE, 1907.

Assistant Manager,

RAYMOND IVES, 1908.

HONORARY MEMBERS.

PROFESSOR WILLIAM LYON PHELPS.
PROFESSOR EDWARD BLISS REED.
MR. FRANK LEA SHORT.

ACTIVE MEMBERS.

1907.

GORDON WILSON ABBOTT.
ALEXANDER CUSHING BROWN.
*FORREST LEONARD DANIELS.
PHILIP LYNDON DODGE.
CHARLES ROBERTS HOPKINS.
MITCHELL STUART LITTLE.
CHAUNCEY BROOKS MCCORMICK.
AMASA STONE MATHER.
DWIGHT RAYMOND MEIGS.
GILBERT LITTLE STARK.
HENRY BARTLETT STIMSON.
GAYLORD THOMAS.
JAMES WATSON WEBB.

1908.

THOMAS ACHELIS.
DAVID VAN NOOY BENNETT.
CHARLES TEMPLETON CROCKER.

* President resigned.

WALTER MORGAN CRUNDEN.

WALTER REMY DRAY.

†ROBERT WARD HARRIS.

CHARLES ELLIOT IDE.

RAYMOND IVES.

SIDNEY ROLLINS OVERALL.

DONALD WALLACE PORTER.

HOWARD STURGES.

1909.

FRANCIS PEABODY BUTLER.

MILES CARRINGTON HANNAH.

STANLEY WESTCOTT HOLMES.

MAXWELL OSWALD PARRY.

REGINALD CARMAN MACKNIGHT PEIRCE.

HUNTINGTON SMITH.

1910

STEPHEN MERRILL CLEMENT, JR.

CHARLES PASCAL FRANCHOT.

THOMAS LAWRASON RIGGS.

HARVEY TRACY WARREN.

1907 S.

GEORGE COLMORE SMITH.

1908 S.

JOHN PATTERSON RAMSEY.

PHILIP STANLEY WAINWRIGHT.

†. Has left College.

FORMER PRODUCTIONS.

May 23d, 1900.

"The Pardoner's Tale" of Chaucer and "The Second Shepherd's Play."

April 23d and 24th, 1901.

Thomas Heywood's "The Fair Maid of the West."

October 22d, 1901.

Bicentennial Campus Celebration—Under Auspices of the Yale Dramatic Association.

April 23d and 24th, 1902.

Sheridan's "The Critic" and Townley's "High Life Below Stairs."

April 27th and 28th, 1903.

Oliver Goldsmith's "The Good-Natured Man."

April 19th and 20th, 1904.

Tom Taylor's "New Men and Old Acres."

April 4th and 5th, and Carnegie Lyceum, New York,

April 7th, 1905.

A. W. Pinero's "The Magistrate."

April 3d and 4th, 1906.

Shakespeare's "Henry IV, Part I."

First Promenade Performance, January 19th, 1907.

A. W. Pinero's "The Amazons."

THE YALE UNIVERSITY DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION

Presents as its

EIGHTH ANNUAL SPRING PRODUCTION

“THE PRETENDERS”

BY HENRIK IBSEN

for the first time in America, under the stage direction of

MR. FRANK LEA SHORT.

**HARTFORD--Parsons' Theatre, Easter Monday, April 1st, 1907,
Matinee and Night.**

**NEW YORK--Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, Tuesday and Wednesday
Evenings, April 2d and 3d.**

**NEW HAVEN--Hyperion Theatre, Friday and Saturday Evenings,
April 5th and 6th.**

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

- HAAKON HAAKONSSON, the King elected by the Birchlegs,
Gilbert Little Stark, 1907.
- INGA OF VARTEIG, his mother,
Charles Templeton Crocker, 1908.
- EARL SKULE, *Thomas Achelis, 1908.*
- LADY RAGNHILD, his wife, *Donald Wallace Porter, 1908.*
- SIGRID, his sister, *Stuart Craig Rand, 1909.*
- MARGRETE, his daughter, *Thomas Laurason Riggs, 1910.*
- GUTHORM INGESSON, *Henry Bartlett Stimson, 1907.*
- SIGURD RIBBUNG, *Maxwell Oswald Parry, 1909.*
- NICHOLAS ARNESSON, Bishop of Oslo,
Charles Roberts Hopkins, 1907.
- DAGFINN THE PEASANT, Haakon's Marshal,
Sidney Rollins Overall, 1908.
- IVAR BODDE, *his chaplain,* *Robert Louis Levy, 1909.*
- VEGARD VÆRADAL, one of his guard,
Alexander Cushing Brown, 1907.
- GREGORIUS JONSSON, a nobleman,
Walter Morgan Crunden, 1908.
- PAUL FLIDA, a nobleman, *Hubert McDonnell, 1909.*
- INGEBORG, Andres Skialdarband's wife,
George Colmore Smith, 1907 S.
- PETER, her son, a young priest,
Harvey Tracy Warren, 1910.
-

SIRA VILIAM, Bishop Nicholas's chaplain,
Mitchell Stuart Little, 1907.

MASTER SIGARD of Brabant, a physician,
Philip Stanley Wainwright, 1908 S.

JATGEIR SKALD, an Icelfander,
Charles Pascal Franchot, 1910.

BAARD BRATTE, a chieftain from the Trondheim district,
George Dahl, 1908.

Populace and Citizens of Bergen, Oslo and Nidaros.

Priests, Monks and Nuns.

Guests, Guards and Ladies.

Men-at-Arms, etc., etc.

The action passes in the first half of the Thirteenth Century.

The Choir is by members of the Yale Glee Club, under the leadership of Winthrop Lakey Carter, 1907.

The Music is by the Yale Orchestra under the direction of Frederick Trowbridge Kelsey, 1907.

Stage Manager—Walter Morgan Crunden, 1908.

Property Man—Hubert McDonnell, 1909.

Assistant Property Man—Robert Louis Levy, 1909.

Costume Committee—Amasa Stone Mather, 1907, Chairman; Charles Templeton Crocker, 1908; Howard Sturges, 1908.

Press Committee—James Watson Webb, 1907, Chairman; Mitchell Stuart Little, 1907; George Dahl, 1908; Charles Seymour, 1908.

THE SCENES.

ACT I.

Scene One. The churchyard of Christ Church, Bergen.

Scene Two. A Hall in the Palace.

ACT II.

Scene. The Banquet Hall in the Palace at Bergen.

ACT III.

Scene One. A Room in the Bishop's Palace at Oslo.

Scene Two. A Room in the Palace.

ACT IV.

Scene. The great Hall in Oslo Palace.

ACT V.

Scene One. A Room in the Palace at Nidaros.

Scene Two. A Fir-wood on the Hills above Nidaros.

Scene Three. The courtyard at Elgesæter Convent.

THE PRETENDERS.

HISTORIC PLAY IN FIVE ACTS.

ACT FIRST.

SCENE FIRST.

The churchyard of Christ Church, Bergen. At the back rises the church, the main portal of which faces the spectators. In front, on the left, stands HAAKON HAAKONSSON, with DAGFINN THE PEASANT, VEGARD OF VÆRADAL, IVAR BODDE, and several other nobles and chieftains. Opposite to him stand EARL SKULE, GREGORIUS JONSSON, PAUL FLIDA, and others of the Earl's men. Further back on the same side are seen SIGURD RIBBUNG and his followers, and a little way from him GUTHORM INGESSON, with several chiefs. Men-at-arms line the approaches to the church; the common people fill the churchyard; all seem to await, in suspense, the occurrence of some event. All the church bells of the town are ringing far and near.

EARL SKULE. [*Softly and impatiently, to GREGORIUS JONSSON.*] Why tarry they so long in there?

GREGORIUS JONSSON. Hush! The psalm is beginning.

THE PRETENDERS.

[From inside the closed church doors, to the accompaniment of trumpets, is heard a CHOIR OF MONKS AND NUNS singing Domine cœli, etc. etc. While the singing is going on, the church door is opened from inside; in the porch BISHOP NICHOLAS is seen, surrounded by Priests and Monks.]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. *[Steps forward to the doorway and proclaims with uplifted crozier.]* Inga of Varteig is even now bearing the iron on behalf of Haakon the Pretender.

[The church door is closed again; the singing inside continues.]

GREGORIUS JONSSON. *[In a low voice, to the EARL.]* Call upon Holy King Olaf to protect the right.

EARL SKULE. *[Hurriedly, with a deprecating gesture.]* Not now. Best not remind him of me.

IVAR BODDE. *[Seizing HAAKON by the arm.]* Pray to the Lord thy God, Haakon Haakonsson.

HAAKON. No need; I am sure of him.

[The singing in the church grows louder; all uncover; many fall upon their knees and pray.]

GREGORIUS JONSSON. *[To the EARL.]* A solemn hour for you and for many!

EARL SKULE. *[Looking anxiously towards the church.]* A solemn hour for Norway.

PAUL FLIDA. *[Near the EARL.]* Now is the glowing iron in her hands.

DAGFINN. *[Beside HAAKON.]* They are coming down the nave.

IVAR BODDE. Christ protect thy tender hands, Inga, mother of the King!

HAAKON. Surely all my life shall reward her for this hour.

EARL SKULE. [*Who has been listening intently, breaks out suddenly.*] Did she cry out? Has she let the iron fall?

PAUL FLIDA. [*Goes up.*] I know not what it was.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. Hark to the women weeping in the outer hall!

THE CHOIR IN THE CHURCH. [*Breaks forth in jubilation.*] Gloria in excelsis Deo!

[*The doors are thrown open. INGA comes forth, followed by Nuns, Priests, and Monks.*

INGA. [*On the church steps.*] God has given judgment! Behold these hands; with them I bore the iron!

VOICES AMONGST THE MULTITUDE. They are not burned! They are not burned!

OTHER VOICES. Marvelous! Not burned.

THE WHOLE MULTITUDE. He is Haakon's son! He is Sverre's grandson!

HAAKON. Thanks to thee, thanks to thee!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*In passing, to the EARL.*] 'Twas ill done to press for the ordeal.

EARL SKULE. Nay, my lord Bishop, needs must we pray for God's voice in this matter.

HAAKON. It is done, then, that which my every fibre cried out against—that which has made my heart shrivel and writhe within me——

DAGFINN. [*Turning towards the multitude.*] Ay, bethink you, all that are gathered here! Who ever doubted her word, until certain folk required that it should be doubted.

PAUL FLIDA. Doubt has whispered in every corner from the hour when Haakon the Pretender was borne, a little child, into King Ingē's hall.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. And last winter it swelled to a roar, and sounded forth over the land, both north and south; I trow every man can bear witness to that.

HAAKON. I myself can best bear witness to it. Therefore have I yielded to the counsel of many faithful friends and humbled myself as no other chosen king has done for many a day. I have proved my birth by the ordeal, proved my right, as the son of Haakon Sverresson, to succeed to the throne of Norway. I will not now question who fostered the doubt, and made it, as the Earl's kinsman says, swell into a roar; but this I know, that I have suffered bitterly under it. I have been chosen king from boyhood, but little kingly honour has been shown me, even where it seemed I might look for it most securely. Yet such slights I could easily have borne, had not open war been like to break loose in the land; that I must needs hinder.

DAGFINN. It may be well for kings to hearken to counsels of prudence; but had my counsel been heard in this matter, it had not been with hot iron, but with cold steel that Haakon Haakonsson had called for judgment between himself and his foes.

HAAKON. Curb yourself, Dagfinn.

EARL SKULE. [*With a slight smile.*] 'Tis easy to call every one the King's foe who chimes not with the King's will. Methinks he is the King's worst foe who would counsel him against making good his right to the kingship.

HAAKON. Who knows? Were my right alone in question, mayhap I had not paid so dear to prove it; but higher things are here at stake: my calling and my duty.

EARL SKULE. There are others here who bear themselves the like fair witness.

SIGURD RIBBUNG. That do I, and with full as good ground. My grandfather was King Magnus Erlingson—

HAAKON. Ay, if your father, Erling Steinvæg, was indeed King Magnus's son.

GUTHORM INGESSON. I am of the stock of Sverre as much as you—

DAGFINN. But not in the true male line.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. You come on the female side, Guthorm.

EARL SKULE. I am King Ingē's lawfully begotten brother, and the law is with me if I claim, and take, his full inheritance.

DAGFINN. Ah, Sir Earl, of a truth you have taken full inheritance, not of your father's wealth alone, but of all the goods Haakon Sverrēsson left behind him.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Not all, good Dagfinn. Respect the truth;—King Haakon has kept a brooch and the golden ring he wears on his arm.

HAAKON. Be that as it will; with God's help I shall win myself wealth again. And now, ye barons and thanes, ye churchmen and chieftains and men-at-arms, now it is time we held the folkmote, as has been agreed. I have sat with bound hands until this day; methinks no man will blame me for longing to have them loosed.

EARL SKULE. There are others in like case, Haakon Haakonsson.

HAAKON. [*His attention arrested.*] What mean you, Sir Earl?

EARL SKULE. I mean that all we Pretenders have the same cause for longing. We have all alike been straitly

bound, for none of us has known how far his right might reach.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The Church has been even as unstable as the kingdom; but now must we abide by the sainted King Olaf's law.

DAGFINN. [*Half aloud.*] Fresh subtleties!

[HAAKON's men gather more closely together.]

HAAKON. [*With forced calmness, advances a couple of paces towards the EARL.*] I would fain think I have not rightly taken your meaning. The ordeal has made good my birthright to the kingdom, and therefore, as I deem, the folkmote has nought to do but to confirm my election, made at the Orething six years ago.

SEVERAL OF THE EARL'S AND SIGURD'S MEN. No, no! That we deny!

EARL SKULE. 'Twas with no such thought that we agreed to hold the folkmote here. The ordeal has not given you the kingdom; it has but proved your title to come forward to-day, along with the other Pretenders here present, and contend for the right you hold to be yours——

HAAKON. [*Constraining himself to be calm.*] That means, in brief, that for six years I have unlawfully borne the name of King, and you, Sir Earl, have for six years unlawfully ruled the land as regent for me.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*To HAAKON.*] The Earl would say that that election gave you but the use of the kingly power, not the right to it.

DAGFINN. [*Exasperated.*] To your swords, King's men, let them decide!

MANY OF THE KING'S MEN. [*Rushing forward.*] Down with the King's enemies!

EARL SKULE. [*Calls to his men.*] Slay none! Wound none! Only keep them off.

HAAKON. [*Restraining his men.*] Up with your blades, all who have drawn them!—Up with your blades, I say! [*Calmly.*] You make things tenfold worse for me by such doings.

EARL SKULE. Even so are men flying at each other's throats all the country over. You see now, Haakon Haakonsson; does not this show clearly what you have to do, if you care aught for the country's peace and the lives of men?

HAAKON. [*After some reflection.*] Yes—I see it. [*HAAKON is silent awhile, then steps forward and says with emphasis:*] The law shall decide, and it alone. Ye Birchlegs who, at the Orething, took me for your King, I free you from the oath ye sware to me. You, Dagfinn, are no longer my marshal; I will not appear with marshal or with guards, with vassals or with henchmen. I am a poor man; all my inheritance is a brooch and this gold ring;—these are scant goods wherewith to reward so many good men's service. Now, ye other Pretenders, now we stand equal; I will have no advantage of you, save the right which I have from above—that I neither can nor will share with any one.—Let the assembly-call be sounded, [*Roll of drums*] and then let God and the Holy King Olaf's law decide.

[*Goes out with his men to the left; blasts of trumpets and horns are heard in the distance.*]

END OF SCENE FIRST.

SCENE SECOND.

A hall in the Palace. In front, on the left, is a low window; on the right, the entrance-door; at the back, a larger door which leads in to the King's Hall. By the window, a table; chairs and benches stand about.

LADY RAGNHILD and MARGRETE enter by the smaller door; SIGRID follows immediately.

LADY RAGNHILD. In here?

MARGRETE. Ay, here it is darkest.

LADY RAGNHILD. [*Goes to the window.*] And here we can look down upon the mote-stead.

MARGRETE. [*Looks out cautiously.*] Ay, there they are, all gathered behind the church. [*Turns, in tears.*] Yonder must now betide what will bring so much in its train.

LADY RAGNHILD. Who will be master in this hall tomorrow?

MARGRETE. Oh, hush! So heavy a day I had never thought to see. There breathe not nobler men than the Earl and Haakon.

LADY RAGNHILD. Hist! What is that? [*At the window.*] What shouts! All the men have risen; all the banners and standards wave in the wind. Look forth, Margrete! Listen! [*Starts back a step.*] All hands are lifted for an oath! [*MARGRETE listens at the window.*]

LADY RAGNHILD. God and St. Olaf, to whom do they swear?

SIGRID. Pray!

[MARGRETE listens, and with uplifted hand motions for silence.]

LADY RAGNHILD. [After a little while.] Speak!

[From the mote-stead is heard a loud blast of trumpets and horns.]

LADY RAGNHILD. God and St. Olaf! To whom have they sworn? [A short pause.]

MARGRETE. [Turns her head and says:] They have chosen Haakon Haakonsson king.

[The music of the royal procession is heard, first in the distance and then nearer and nearer. LADY RAGNHILD clings weeping to SIGRID, who leads her quietly out on the right; MARGRETE remains immovable, leaning against the window-frame. The KING'S attendants open the great doors, disclosing the interior of the Hall, which is gradually filled by the procession from the mote-stead.]

HAAKON. [In the doorway, turning to IVAR BODDE.] Bring me a pen and wax and silk—I have parchment here. [Advances exultantly to the table and spreads some rolls of parchment upon it.] Margrete, now am I King!

MARGRETE. Hail to my lord and King!

HAAKON. I thank you. [Looks at her and takes her hand.] Forgive me; I forgot that it must wound you.

MARGRETE. [Drawing her hand away.] It did not wound me;—of a surety you are born to be king.

HAAKON. [*With animation.*] Ay, must not all men own it, who remembered how marvellously God and the saints have shielded me from all harm? [*Impatiently.*] What is keeping him? [IVAR BODDE *comes with the writing materials.*] Are you there? Give me the things!

[HAAKON *seats himself at the table and writes. A little while after, EARL SKULE comes in; then DAGFINN THE PEASANT, BISHOP NICHOLAS and VEGARD VÆRADAL.*

HAAKON. [*Looks up and lays down his pen.*] Know you, Sir Earl, what I am writing here? [*The EARL approaches.*] This is to my mother; I thank her for all her love, and kiss her a thousand times—here in the letter you understand. She is to be sent eastward to Borgasysse, there to live with all queenly honours.

EARL SKULE. You will not keep her in the palace?

HAAKON. She is too dear to me, Earl;—a king must have none about him whom he loves too well. A king must act with free hands; he must stand alone; he must neither be led nor lured. There is so much to be mended in Norway. [*Goes on writing.*

VEGARD VÆRADAL. [*Softly to BISHOP NICHOLAS.*] 'Tis by my counsel he deals thus with Inga, his mother.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. I knew your hand in it at once.

VEGARD VÆRADAL. But now one good turn deserves another.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Wait. I will keep my promise.

HAAKON. [*Gives the parchment to IVAR BODDE.*] Fold it together and bear it to her yourself, with many loving greetings—

IVAR BODDE. [*Who has glanced at the parchment.*] My lord—you write here—"to-day"—!

HAAKON. The wind is fair for a southward course.

DAGFINN. [*Slowly.*] Bethink you, my lord King, that she has lain all night on the altar-steps in prayer and fasting.

IVAR BODDE. And she may well be weary after the ordeal.

HAAKON. True, true;—my good, kind mother——! [*Collects himself.*] Well, if she be too weary, let her wait until to-morrow.

IVAR BODDE. It shall be as you will. [*Puts another parchment forward.*] But this other, my lord.

HAAKON. That other?—Ivar Bodde, I cannot.

DAGFINN. [*Points to the letter for INGA.*] Yet you could do that.

IVAR BODDE. All things sinful must be put away.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Who has drawn near in the meantime.*] Bind the Earl's hands, King Haakon.

HAAKON. [*In a low voice.*] Think you that is needful?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. At no cheaper rate can you buy peace in the land.

HAAKON. Then I can do it! Give me the pen!

[*Writes.*]

EARL SKULE. [*To the BISHOP, who crosses to the right.*] You have the King's ear, it would seem.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. For your behoof.

EARL SKULE. Say you so?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Before nightfall you will thank me.

[*He moves away.*]

HAAKON. [*Hands the EARL the parchment.*] Read that, Earl Skule.

EARL SKULE. [*Reads, looks in surprise at the KING, and says in a low voice.*] You break with Kanga the Young?

HAAKON. With Kanga whom I have loved more than all the world. From this day forth she must never more cross the King's path.

EARL SKULE. This that you do is a great thing, Haakon. Mine own memory tells me what it must cost.

HAAKON. Whoever is too dear to the King must away.—Tie up the letter. [*Gives it to IVAR BODDE.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Bending over the chair.*] You have made a great stride towards the Earl's friendship, my lord King.

HAAKON. [*Holds out his hand to him.*] I thank you, Bishop Nicholas; you counselled me for the best. Ask a grace of me, and I will grant it.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Will you?

HAAKON. I promise it on my kingly faith.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Then make Vegard Væradal thane of Halogaland.

HAAKON. Vegard? He is well-nigh the trustiest friend I have; I am loath to send him so far from me.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The King's friend must be royally rewarded. Bind the Earl's hands as I have counselled you, and you will be secure for ever and a day.

HAAKON. [*Takes a sheet of parchment.*] Vegard shall bear rule in Halogaland. [*Writing.*] I hereby grant it under my royal hand. [*The BISHOP retires.*]

EARL SKULE. [*Approaches the table.*] What write you now?

HAAKON. [*Hands him the sheet.*] Read.

EARL SKULE. [*Reads, and looks steadily at the KING.*] Vegard Væradal? In Halogaland?

HAAKON. The northern part stands vacant.

EARL SKULE. Bethink you that Andres Skialdarband has also a charge in the north. They two are bitter foes;—Andres Skialdarband is of my following——

HAAKON. [*Smiling and rising.*] And Vegard Væradal of mine. Therefore they must e'en make friends again, the sooner the better. Henceforth there must be no enmity between the King's men and the Earl's.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ha!—this may go too far.

[*Approaches, uneasy.*]

EARL SKULE. Your thoughts are wise and deep, Haakon.

HAAKON. [*Warmly.*] Earl Skule, to-day have I taken the kingdom from you—let your daughter share it with me!

EARL SKULE. My daughter!

MARGRETE. Oh, God!

HAAKON. Margrete! [*MARGRETE is silent. Takes her hand.*] Answer me.

MARGRETE. [*Softly.*] I will gladly be your wife.

EARL SKULE. [*Pressing HAAKON's hand.*] Peace and friendship from my heart!

HAAKON. I thank you.

IVAR BODDE. [*To DAGFINN.*] Heaven be praised; here is the dawn.

DAGFINN. I almost believe it. Never before have I liked the Earl so well.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Behind him.*] Ever on your guard, good Dagfinn—ever on your guard.

IVAR BODDE. [*To VEGARD.*] Now are you thane in Halogaland; here you have it under the King's hand.

[*Gives him the letter.*]

VEGARD VÆRADAL. I will thank the King for his favour another time. *[About to go.]*

BISHOP NICHOLAS. *[Stops him.]* Andres Skialdarband is an ugly neighbour; be not cowed by him.

VEGARD VÆRADAL. No one has yet cowed Vegard Væradal. *[Goes.]*

BISHOP NICHOLAS. *[Following.]* Be as rock and flint to Andres Skialdarband,—and, while I think on't, take my blessing with you.

IVAR BODDE. *[Who has been waiting behind the KING with the parchments in his hand.]* Here are the letters, my lord.

HAAKON. Good; give them to the Earl.

IVAR BODDE. To the Earl? Will you not seal them?

HAAKON. The Earl is wont to do that;—he holds the seal.

IVAR BODDE. *[Softly.]* Ay, hitherto—while he was regent—but now!

HAAKON. Now as before;—the Earl holds the seal.

[Moves away.]

EARL SKULE. Give me the letters, Ivar Bodde.

[Goes to the table with them, takes out the Great Seal which he wears under his girdle, and seals the letters during the following.]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. *[Muttering.]* Haakon Haakonsson is King—and the Earl holds the royal seal;—I like that—I like that.

HAAKON. What says my lord Bishop?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. I say that God and St. Olaf watch over their holy church. *[Goes into the King's Hall.]*

END OF ACT FIRST.



CHARLES ROBERTS HOPKINS, 1907,
as Nicholas Arnesson.

THE
PUBLIC
ASTOR LENOX AND
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ACT SECOND.

SCENE FIRST.

Banquet Hall in the Palace at Bergen. A large bay-window in the middle of the back wall, along which there is a dais with seats for the ladies. Against the left wall stands the throne, raised some steps above the floor; in the centre of the opposite wall is the great entrance door. Banners, standards, shields and weapons, with many-coloured draperies, hang from the wall-timbers and from the carved rafters. Around the hall stand drinking-tables, with flagons, horns, and beakers.

KING HAAKON sits upon the dais, with MARGRETE, SIGRID, LADY RAGNHILD, and many noble ladies. IVAR BODDE stands behind the King's chair. Round the drinking-tables are seated the King's and the Earl's men, with guests. At the foremost table on the right sit, among others, DAGFINN THE PEASANT, GREGORIUS JONSSON, and PAUL FLIDA. EARL SKULE and BISHOP NICHOLAS are playing chess at a table on the left. The Earl's house-folk go to and fro, bearing cans of liquor. From an adjoining room, music is heard during the following scene.

DAGFINN. The fifth day now wears on, yet the henchmen are none the less nimble at setting forth the brimming flagons.

PAUL FLIDA. It was never the Earl's wont to stint his guests.

DAGFINN. No, so it would seem. So royal a bridal-feast was never seen in Norway before.

PAUL FLIDA. Earl Skule has never before given a daughter in marriage.

DAGFINN. True, true; the Earl is a mighty man.

A MAN-AT-ARMS. He holds a third part of the kingdom. That is more than any earl has held heretofore.

PAUL FLIDA. But the King's part is larger.

DAGFINN. We talk not of that here; we are friends now, and fully at one. [*Drinks to PAUL.*] So let King be King and Earl be Earl.

PAUL FLIDA. [*Laughs.*] 'Tis easy to hear that you are a King's man.

DAGFINN. That should the Earl's men also be.

PAUL FLIDA. Never. We have sworn fealty to the Earl, not to the King.

DAGFINN. That may yet have to be done.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*To the EARL, under cover of the game.*] Hear you what Dagfinn the Peasant says?

EARL SKULE. [*Without looking up.*] I hear.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. [*Looking steadily at DAGFINN.*] Has the King thoughts of that?

DAGFINN. Nay, nay,—let be;—no wrangling to-day.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The King would force your men to swear him fealty, Earl.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. [*Louder.*] Has the King thoughts of that, I ask?

DAGFINN. I will not answer. Let us drink to peace and friendship between the King and the Earl. The ale is good.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Makes a move and says laughingly to the EARL.*] I take the pawn, Sir Earl.

EARL SKULE. [*Aloud.*] Take him; a pawn is of small account. [*Makes a move.*]

[*Joking and laughter from crowd on right.*]

DAGFINN. Ay; that the Icelfander found to his cost, when Sigurd Ribbung escaped to Vermeland.

[*Suppressed laughter amongst the King's men; the conversation is continued in a low tone; presently a man comes in and whispers to GREGORIUS JONSSON.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Then I move here, and you have lost.

EARL SKULE. So it would seem.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Leaning back in his chair.*] You did not guard the king well at the last.

EARL SKULE. [*Strews the pieces topsy-turvy and rises.*] I have long been weary of guarding kings.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. [*Approaches and says in a low tone.*] Sir Earl, Jostein Tamb sends word that the ship now lies ready for sea.

EARL SKULE. [*Softly.*] Good. [*Takes out a sealed parchment.*] Here is the letter.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. [*Shaking his head.*] Earl, Earl,—is this well bethought?

EARL SKULE. What?

GREGORIUS JONSSON. It bears the King's seal.

EARL SKULE. I am acting for the King's good.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. Then let the King himself reject the offer.

EARL SKULE. That he will not, if he has his own way. His whole heart is bent on cowing the Ribbungs, therefore he is fain to secure himself on other sides.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. Your way may be wise,—but it is dangerous.

EARL SKULE. Leave that to me. Take the letter, and bid Jostein sail forthwith.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. It shall be as you command.

[Goes out to the right, and presently comes in again.]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. *[To the EARL.]* You have much to see to, it would seem.

EARL SKULE. But small thanks for it.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The King has risen.

[HAAKON comes down; all the men rise from the tables.]

HAAKON. *[To the BISHOP.]* We are rejoiced to see you bear up so bravely and well through all these days of merriment.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. There comes a flicker now and again, my lord King; but 'twill scarce last long. I have lain sick all the winter through.

HAAKON. Ay, ay,—you have lived a strong life, rich in deeds of fame.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. *[Shakes his head.]* Ah, 'tis little enough I have done, and I have much still left to do. If I but knew whether I should have time for it all!

HAAKON. The living must take up the tasks of those who go before, honoured lord; we all have the welfare of the land at heart.

DAGFINN. [*Approaching.*] Now may we sound the call to the weapon-sports on the green, if so please you, my lord.

HAAKON. Good. To-day will we give up to nought but merriment; to-morrow we must turn our thoughts again to the Ribbings and the Earl of Orkney.

[HAAKON goes towards the dais, gives his hand to MARGRETE, and leads her out to the right; the others gradually follow.]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*To IVAR BODDE.*] Who is the man called Jostein Tamb?

IVAR BODDE. There is a trader from Orkney who bears that name.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. From Orkney? So, so! And now he sails home again?

IVAR BODDE. So I think.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Softly.*] With a precious freight, Ivar Bodde.

IVAR BODDE. Corn and raiment, most like.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. And a letter from Earl Skule.

IVAR BODDE. [*Starting.*] To whom?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. I know not; it bore the King's seal——

IVAR BODDE. [*Seizes him by the arm.*] Lord Bishop,—is it as you say?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Hush! Do not mix me up in the matter. [*Retires.*]

IVAR BODDE. Then must I straightway—— Dagfinn the Peasant! Dagfinn! Dagfinn——!

[Pushes through the crowd towards the door.]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. *[In a tone of commiseration, to GREGORIUS JONSSON.]* Never a day but one or another must suffer in goods or freedom.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. Who is it now?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. A poor trader,—Jostein Tamb methinks they called him.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. Jostein——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Dagfinn the Peasant would forbid him to set sail.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. Dagfinn, would forbid him, say you?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. He went even now.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. Pardon, my lord; I must make speed——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ay, do even so, my dear lord;—Dagfinn the Peasant is so hasty.

[GREGORIUS JONSSON hastens out to the right along with the remainder of the company; only EARL SKULE and BISHOP NICHOLAS are left behind in the hall.]

EARL SKULE. *[Walks up and down in deep thought; he seems suddenly to awaken; looks round him, and says:]* How still it has become here of a sudden!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The King has gone.

EARL SKULE. And every one has followed him.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. All, save us.

EARL SKULE. It is a great thing to be King.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Tentatively.*] Are you fain to try it, Earl?

EARL SKULE. [*With a serious smile.*] I have tried it; every night that brings me sleep makes me King of Norway.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Dreams forbode.

EARL SKULE. Ay, and tempt.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Not you, surely. In bygone days, that I could understand—but now, when you hold a third part of the kingdom, rule as the first man in the land, and are the Queen's father——

EARL SKULE. Now most of all—now most of all.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Hide nothing! Confess; for verily I can see a great pain is gnawing you.

EARL SKULE. Now most of all, I say. This is the great curse that lies upon my whole life; to stand so near to the highest,—with an abyss between. One leap, and on the other side are the kingship, and the purple robe, the throne, the might, and all! I have it daily before my eyes—but can never reach it.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. True, Earl, true.

EARL SKULE. When they made Guthorm Sigurdsson king, I was in the full strength of my youth; It was as though a voice cried aloud within me: Away with the child,—I am the man, the strong man!—But Guthorm was the king's son; there yawned an abyss between me and the throne.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. And you dared not venture——

EARL SKULE. Then Erling Steinvæg was chosen by the Slittungs. The voice cried within me again: Skule is a greater chieftain than Erling Steinvæg! But I must needs have broken with the Birchlegs,—that was the abyss that time.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. And Erling became king of the Slit-tungs, and after of the Ribbungs, and still you waited!

EARL SKULE. I waited for Guthorm to die.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. And Guthorm died, and Inge Baardsson, your brother, became king.

EARL SKULE. Then I waited for my brother's death. He was sickly from the first; every morning, when we met at holy mass, I would cast stolen glances to see whether his sickness increased. Every twitch of pain that crossed his face was as a puff of wind in my sails, and bore me nearer to the throne. Every sigh he breathed in his agony sounded to me like an echoing trumpet-blast, like a herald from afar, proclaiming that the throne should soon be mine. Thus I tore up by the roots every thought of brotherly kindness; and Inge died, and Haakon came—and the Birchlegs made him king.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. And you waited.

EARL SKULE. Methought help must come from above. I felt the kingly strength within me, and I was growing old; every day that passed was a day taken from my life-work. Each evening I thought: To-morrow will come the miracle that shall strike him down and set me in the empty seat.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Small was then Haakon's power; he was no more than a child; it wanted but a single step from you—yet you took it not.

EARL SKULE. That step was hard to take; it would have parted me from my kindred and from all my friends.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ay, there is the rub, Earl Skule,—that is the curse which has lain upon your life. You would fain know every way open at need,—you dare not break all your bridges and keep only one, defend it alone, and on it conquer or fall. You lay snares for your foe, you set traps

for his feet, and hang sharp swords over his head; you strew poison in every dish, and you spread a hundred nets for him; but when he walks into your toils you dare not draw the string; if he stretch out his hand for the poison, you think it safer he should fall by the sword; if he is like to be caught in the morning, you hold it wiser to wait till eventide.

EARL SKULE. [*Looking earnestly at him.*] And what would you do, my lord Bishop?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Speak not of me; my work is to build up thrones in this land, not to sit on them and rule.

EARL SKULE. [*After a short pause.*] Answer me one thing, my honoured lord, and answer me truly. How comes it that Haakon can follow the straight path so unflinchingly? He is no wiser, no bolder than I.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The most fortunate man is he whom the cravings of his time seize like a passion, begetting thoughts he himself cannot fathom, and pointing to paths which lead he knows not whither, but which he follows and must follow till he hears the people shout for joy, and, looking around him with wondering eyes, finds that he has done a mighty deed.

EARL SKULE. Ay, there is that unswerving confidence in Haakon.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. It is that which the Romans called *ingenium*.—Truly I am not strong in Latin; but 'twas called *ingenium*.

EARL SKULE. [*Thoughtfully at first, afterwards in increasing excitement.*] Is Haakon made of other clay than mine? The fortunate man?—Ay, does not everything thrive with him? Does not everything shape itself for the best, when he is concerned? Even the peasants note it;

they say the trees bear fruit twice, and the fowls hatch out two broods every summer, whilst Haakon is king. And how easy has been his path to the throne! He needed that Inge should die early, and Inge died: his youth needed to be watched and warded, and his men kept watch and ward around him; he needed the ordeal, and his mother arose and bore the iron for him.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*With an involuntary outburst.*]
But we—we two——!

EARL SKULE. We?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. You, I would say—what of you?

EARL SKULE. The right is Haakon's, Bishop.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The right is his, for he is the fortunate one; 'tis even the summit of fortune, to have the right. But by what right has Haakon the right, and not you?

EARL SKULE. [*After a short pause.*] There are things I pray God to save me from thinking upon.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Fulfil your cravings and use your strength: so much right has every man.

EARL SKULE. Ay, for that which is good.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Words, empty words! There is neither good nor evil, up nor down, high nor low. You must forget such words, else will you never take the last stride, never leap the abyss.

EARL SKULE. [*Gazing thoughtfully before him.*]
What has that throne not cost me, which yet I have not reached! And what has it cost Haakon, who now sits in it so securely! I was young, and I forswore my sweet secret love to ally myself with a powerful house. I prayed to the saints that I might be blessed with a son—I got only daughters.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Haakon will have sons, Earl—mark that!

EARL SKULE. [*Crossing to the window on the right.*] Ay—all things fall out to Haakon's wish.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Rouse you, man; straighten your back! To what end got you your masterful soul? Bethink you that the first great deed in all the world was done by one who rose against a mighty realm!

EARL SKULE. Who?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The angel who rose against the light!

EARL SKULE. And was hurled into the bottomless pit—

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Wildly.*] And founded there a kingdom, and made himself a king, a mighty king—mightier than any of the ten thousand—earls up yonder!

[*Sinks down upon a bench beside the table.*]

EARL SKULE. [*Looks long at him.*] Bishop Nicholas, are you something more or something less than a man?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Smiling.*] I am in the state of innocence: I know not good from evil.

EARL SKULE. [*Half to himself.*] Why did they send me into the world, if they meant not to order it better for me? Haakon has so firm and unswerving a faith in himself—all his men have so firm and unswerving a faith in him——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Let it not be seen that you have no such faith in yourself! Speak as though you had it, swear great oaths that you have it—and all will believe you.

EARL SKULE. Had I a son! Had I but a son, to take all the great heritage after me!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Eagerly.*] Earl—if you had a son?

EARL SKULE. I have none.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Haakon will have sons.

EARL SKULE. [*Wringing his hands.*] And is king-born!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Rising.*] Earl—if he were not so?

EARL SKULE. Has he not proved it? The ordeal——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. And if he were not—in spite of the ordeal?

EARL SKULE. Do you say that God lied in the issue of the ordeal?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. What was it Inga of Varteig called upon God to witness?

EARL SKULE. That the child she bore in the eastland, in Borgasysse, was the son of Haakon Sverresson.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Nods, looks round, and says softly.*] And if King Haakon were not that child?

EARL SKULE. [*Starts a step backwards.*] Great God——! [*Controls himself.*] It is beyond belief.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Harken to me, Earl Skule. I have lived seventy years and six; it begins to go sharply downhill with me now, and I dare not take this secret with me over yonder——

EARL SKULE. Speak, speak! Is he not the son of Haakon Sverresson?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Hear me. It was known to none that Inga was with child. Haakon Sverresson was lately dead, and doubtless she feared Inge Baardsson, who was then king, and you, and—well, and the Baglers too mayhap. She was brought to bed secretly in the house of Trond the Priest, in Heggen parish, and after nine days she departed homewards; but the child remained a whole year with the priest, she not daring to look to it, and none knowing that it breathed save Trond and his two sons.

EARL SKULE. Ay, ay—and then?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. When the child was a year old, it could scarce be kept hidden longer. So Inga made the matter known to Erlend of Huseby—an old Birchleg of Sverre's days, as you know.

EARL SKULE. Well?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. He and other chiefs from the Uplands took the child, bore it over the mountains in mid-winter, and brought it to the King, who was then at Nidaros.

EARL SKULE. And yet you can say that——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Needless to say, 'twas a dangerous task for a humble priest to rear a king's child. So soon as the child was born, he laid the matter before one of his superiors in the church, and prayed for his counsel. This his superior bade Trond send the true king's son with secrecy to a place of safety, and give Inga another, if she or the Birchlegs should afterwards ask for her child.

EARL SKULE. [*Indignantly.*] And who was the hound that gave that counsel?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. It was I.

EARL SKULE. You? Ay, you have ever hated the race of Sverre.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. I deemed it not safe for the king's son to fall into your hands.

EARL SKULE. But the priest——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Promised to do as I bade.

EARL SKULE. [*Seizing him by the arm.*] And Haakon is the other child?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. If the priest kept his promise.

EARL SKULE. If he kept it?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Trond the Priest departed the land the same winter that the child was brought to King Inge.

He journeyed to Thomas Beckett's grave, and afterwards abode in England till his death.

EARL SKULE. He departed the land, say you? Then must he have changed the children and dreaded the vengeance of the Birchlegs.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Or he did not change the children, and dreaded my vengeance.

EARL SKULE. Which surmise hold you for the truth?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Either may well be true.

EARL SKULE. But the priest's sons of whom you spoke?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. They went with the crusaders to the Holy Land.

EARL SKULE. And there have since been no tidings of them?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ay, tidings there have been.

EARL SKULE. Where are they?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. They were drowned in the Greek Sea on the journey forth.

EARL SKULE. And Inga——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Knows nought, either of the priest's confession or of my counsel.

EARL SKULE. Her child was but nine days old when she left it, you said?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ay, and the child she next saw was over a year——

EARL SKULE. Then no living creature can here bring light! [*Paces rapidly to and fro.*] Almighty God, can this be true? Haakon—the King—he who holds sway over all this land, not born of royal blood!—And why should it not be like enough? Has not all fortune miraculously followed him?—Why not this also, to be taken as a child from a poor cottar's hut and laid in a king's cradle—?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Whilst the whole people believes that he is the king's son——

EARL SKULE. Whilst he himself believes it, Bishop—that is the heart of his fortune, that is the girdle of his strength! [*Goes to the window.*] See how bravely he sits his horse! None rides as he does. His eyes are filled with laughing, dancing sunshine; he looks forth into the day as though he knew himself created to go forward, ever forward. [*Turns towards the BISHOP.*] I am a king's arm, mayhap a king's brain as well; but he is the whole King.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Yet no king after all, mayhap.

EARL SKULE. Mayhap no king after all.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Lays his hand on the EARL's shoulder.*] Hearken to me, Earl Skule——

EARL SKULE. [*Stops, and cries out in wonder.*] What is that?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. What?

EARL SKULE. Dagfinn the Peasant bursts violently through the crowd. Now he is giving the King some tidings.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Looking out from behind the EARL.*] Haakon seems angered—does he not? He clenches his fist——

EARL SKULE. He looks hitherward—what can it be?

[*About to go.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Holding him back.*] Hearken to me, Earl Skule—there may yet be one means of winning assurance as to Haakon's right.

EARL SKULE. One means, you say?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Trond the Priest, ere he died, wrote a letter telling his whole tale, and took the sacrament in witness of its truth.

EARL SKULE. And that letter—for God's pity's sake—where is it?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. You must know that—— [*Looks towards the door.*] Hush!—here comes the King.

EARL SKULE. The letter, Bishop—the letter!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The King is here.

[*HAAKON enters, followed by his Guard and many guests. Immediately afterwards, MARGRETE appears; she seems anxious and alarmed, and is about to rush up to the KING, when she is restrained by LADY RAGNHILD, who with other ladies, has followed her. SIGRID stands somewhat apart, towards the back. The EARL's men appear uneasy, and gather in a group on the right, where SKULE is standing, but some way behind him.*]

HAAKON. [*In strong but repressed excitement.*] Earl Skule, who is king in this land?

EARL SKULE. Who is king?

HAAKON. That was my question. I bear the kingly title, but who holds the kingly might?

EARL SKULE. The kingly might should dwell with him who has the kingly right.

HAAKON. So should it be; but is it so?

EARL SKULE. Do you summon me to judgment?

HAAKON. That do I; for that right I have toward every man in the land.

EARL SKULE. I fear not to answer for my dealings.

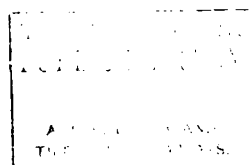
HAAKON. Well for us all if you can. [*Mounts a step of throne-dais, and leans upon one arm of the throne.*] Here stand I as your king, and ask: Know you that Jon, Earl of Orkney, has risen against me?

EARL SKULE. Yes.

HAAKON. That he denies to pay me tribute?



GILBERT LITTLE STARK, 1907,
as Haakon Haakonsson.



EARL SKULE. Yes.

HAAKON. And is it true that you, Sir Earl, have this day sent him a letter?

EARL SKULE. Who says so?

IVAR BODDE. That do I.

HAAKON. 'Twas our will to deal with him ourself.—And what answer made you?

EARL SKULE. Read my letter.

HAAKON. Give it me!

GREGORIUS JONSSON. [*Aside to SKULE.*] It lies at the bottom of the fiord.

EARL SKULE. You have done ill—ill.

HAAKON. I await the letter, Sir Earl.

EARL SKULE. I cannot give it you.

HAAKON. You cannot!

EARL SKULE. [*Advancing a step towards the KING.*] My pride brooks not to be put to shifts, as you and your men would call it——

HAAKON. [*Controlling his rising wrath.*] And so——?

EARL SKULE. In one word—I will not give it you!

HAAKON. Then you defy me!

EARL SKULE. Since so it must be—yes, I defy you.

IVAR BODDE. [*Forcibly.*] Now, my lord King, I scarce think you or any man can now need further proof!

DAGFINN. Nay, now I think we know the Earl's mind.

PAUL FLIDA. [*Enraged, to the bystanders.*] Earl's men! Shall we abide this longer?

GREGORIUS JONSSON. [*Steps forward.*] No, we can and will no more abide it.

HAAKON. Good. Then we ourselves must do justice in the matter!

EARL SKULE. [*With an expression of alarm.*] There will be bloodshed on both sides, my lord King!

HAAKON. So be it; none the less shall the deed be avenged. [*After a short pause, draws his sword, and says with quiet determination.*] All the Earl's men shall take the oath of fealty.

EARL SKULE. [*Vehemently.*] Is this your settled purpose? [*Almost imploringly.*] King Haakon, do not so!

HAAKON. No Earl's man shall leave Bergen ere he has sworn fealty to the King.

[*Goes out with his Guard. All except the EARL and BISHOP follow him.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. He has dealt hardly with you to-day!

[*EARL SKULE is silent, and looks out after the KING, as though struck dumb.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*More loudly.*] And mayhap not king-born after all.

EARL SKULE. [*Turns suddenly, in strong excitement, and seizes the BISHOP by the arm.*] Trond the Priest's confession—where is it?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. He sent it to me from England ere he died; I know not by whom—and it never reached me.

EARL SKULE. But it must be found!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. I doubt not but it may.

EARL SKULE. And if you find it, you will give it into my hands?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. That I promise.

EARL SKULE. You swear it by your soul's salvation?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. I swear it by my soul's salvation!

EARL SKULE. Good; till that time I will work against Haakon, wherever it can be done secretly and unnoted.

He must be hindered from growing mightier than I, ere the struggle begins.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. But should it prove that he is in truth king-born—what then?

EARL SKULE. Then I must try to pray—to pray for humbleness, that I may serve him with all my might, as a faithful chieftain.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. And if he be not the rightful king?

EARL SKULE. Then shall he give place to me! The kingly title and the kingly throne, host and guard, fleet and tribute, towns and strongholds, all shall be mine!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. He will betake him to Viken——

EARL SKULE. I will drive him out of Viken!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. He will establish himself in Nidaros.

EARL SKULE. I will storm Nidaros!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. He will shut himself up in Olaf's holy church——

EARL SKULE. I will force the sanctuary——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. He will fly to the high altar, and cling to Olaf's shrine——

EARL SKULE. I will drag him down from the altar, though I drag the shrine along with him——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. But the crown will still be on his head, Earl Skule!

EARL SKULE. I will strike off the crown with my sword!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. But if it sits too tight——?

EARL SKULE. Then, in God's name or Satan's—I will strike off the head along with it! [*Goes out to the right.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Looks out after him, nods slowly, and says:*] Ay—ay—'tis in this mood I like the Earl!

END OF ACT SECOND.

BISHOP NICHOLAS *enters, supported by MASTER SIGARD and a priest. He is in his canonicals, but without crozier and mitre.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Light more candles. [*He is led to a seat upon the couch, near the brasier, and is covered with rugs.*] Viliam! Now have I been granted forgiveness for all my sins! They took them all away with them;—meseems I am so light now.

SIRA VILIAM. The Duke sends you greeting, my lord; he has already passed Hoved-isle!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. 'Tis well, very well. Belike the King, too, will soon be here. I have been a sinful hound in my day, Viliam; I have grievously trespassed against the King. The priests in there averred that all my sins should be forgiven me;—well well, it may be so; but 'tis easy for them to promise; 'tis not against them that I have trespassed. No, no; it is safest to have it from the King's own mouth. [*Exclaims impatiently.*] Light, I say! 'tis so dark in here.

SIRA VILIAM. The candles are lighted——

MASTER SIGARD. [*Stops him by a sign, and approaches the BISHOP.*] How goes it with you, my lord?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. So-so—so-so; my hands and feet are cold.

MASTER SIGARD. [*Half aloud, as he moves the brasier nearer.*] Ha—'tis the beginning of the end.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Apprehensively, to VILIAM.*] I have commanded that eight monks shall chant and pray for me in the chapel to-night. Have an eye to them; there are idle fellows among them.

[SIRA VILIAM *points silently towards the chapel, whence singing is heard, which continues during what follows.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS. So much still undone, and to go and leave it all! So much undone, Viliam!

SIRA VILIAM. My lord, think of heavenly things!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. I have time before me;—till well on in the morning, Master Sigard thinks——

SIRA VILIAM. My lord, my lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Give me mitre and crozier!—'Tis very well for you to say that I should think—— [*A priest brings them.*] So, set the cap there, 'tis too heavy for me; give me the crozier in my hand; there, now am I in my armour. A bishop!—— The Evil One dare not grapple with me now!

SIRA VILIAM. Desire you aught beside?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. No. Stay—tell me:—Peter, Andres Skialdarband's son,—all speak well of him—

SIRA VILIAM. In truth, his is a blameless soul.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Peter, you shall watch beside me until the King or the Duke shall come. Leave us, meanwhile, ye others, but be at hand.

[*All except PETER go out on the right.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*After a short pause.*] Peter!

PETER. [*Approaches.*] My lord?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Hast ever seen old men die?

PETER. No.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. They are all afeard; that I dare swear. There on the table lies a large letter with seals to it; give it to me. [*PETER brings the letter.*] 'Tis to your mother.

PETER. To my mother?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. You must get you northward with it to Halogaland. I have written to her touching a great and weighty matter; tidings have come from your father.

PETER. He is fighting as a soldier of God in the Holy Land. Should he fall there, he falls on hallowed ground; for there every foot's-breadth of earth is sacred. I commend him to God in all my prayers.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Is Andres Skialdarband dear to you?

PETER. He is an honourable man; but there lives another man whose greatness my mother, as it were, fostered and nourished me withal.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Hurriedly and eagerly.*] Is that Duke Skule?

PETER. Ay, the Duke—Skule Baardsson. My mother knew him in younger days. The Duke must sure be the greatest man in the land!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. There is the letter; get you northward with it forthwith!—Are they not singing in there?

PETER. They are, my lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Eight lusty fellows with throats like trumpets, they must surely help somewhat, methinks.

PETER. My lord, my lord! Why not pray yourself!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. I have too much still undone, Peter. Life is all too short;—besides, the King will surely forgive me when he comes—— [*Gives a start in pain.*]

PETER. You are suffering?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. I suffer not; but there is a ringing in mine ears, a twinkling and flickering before mine eyes——

PETER. 'Tis the heavenly bells ringing you home, and the twinkling of the altar-lights God's angels have lit for you.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ay, sure 'tis so;—there is no danger if only they lag not with their prayers in there—— Farewell; set forth at once with the letter.

PETER. Shall I not first——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Nay, go; I fear not to be alone.

PETER. Well met again, then, what time the heavenly bells shall sound for me too. [*Goes out on the right.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The heavenly bells,—ay, 'tis easy talking when you still have two stout legs to stand upon.—So much undone! But much will live after me, notwithstanding. I promised the Duke by my soul's salvation to give him Trond the Priest's confession if it came into my hand;—'tis well I have not got it. Had he certainty, he would conquer or fall; and then one of the twain would be the mightiest man that ever lived in Norway. No, no,—what *I* could not reach none other shall reach. [*Terrified.*] Mercy, pity! It is I who bear the guilt—I, who set it all agoing! [*Calming himself.*] Well, well, well! but now the King is coming—'tis he that suffers most—he will forgive me—prayers and masses shall be said; there is no danger;—I am a bishop, and I have never slain any man with mine own hand.—'Tis well that Trond the Priest's confession came not; the saints are with me, they will not tempt me to break my promise.—Who knocks at the door? It must be the Duke! [*Rubs his hands with glee.*] He will implore me for proofs as to the kingship,—and I have no proofs to give him!

INGA OF VARTEIG *enters; she is dressed in black, with a cloak and hood.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Starts.*] Who is that?

INGA. A woman from Varteig in Borgasyssel, my honoured lord.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The King's mother!

INGA. So was I called once.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Go, go! 'Twas not I counselled Haakon to send you away.

INGA. What the King does is well done; 'tis not therefore I come.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Wherefore then?

INGA. Gunnulf, my brother, is come home from England——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. From England——!

INGA. He has been away these many years, as you know, and has roamed far and wide; now has he brought home a letter——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Breathlessly.*] A letter——?

INGA. From Trond the Priest. 'Tis for you, my lord.

[*Hands it to him.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ah, truly;—and you bring it?

INGA. It was Trond's wish. I owe him great thanks since the time he fostered Haakon. It was told me that you were sick; therefore I set forth at once; I have come hither on foot——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. There was no such haste, Inga!

DAGFINN THE PEASANT *enters from the right.*

DAGFINN. God's peace, my honoured lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Comes the King?

DAGFINN. He is now riding down the Ryen hills, with the Queen and the King-child and a great following.

INGA. [*Rushes up to DAGFINN.*] The King,—the King! Comes he hither?

DAGFINN. Yes.

INGA. Then will I hide me in a gateway as he goes by;—and then home to Varteig. [*Goes out to the right.*]

DAGFINN. I have fulfilled mine errand; I go to meet the King.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Bear him most loving greeting, good Dagfinn!

DAGFINN. [*As he goes out to the right.*] I would not be Bishop Nicholas to-morrow.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Trond the Priest's confession——! So it has come after all—here I hold it in my hand. [*Muses with a fixed gaze.*] A man should never promise aught by his soul's salvation, when he is as old as I. Had I years before me, I could always wriggle free from such a promise; but this evening, this last evening—no, that were imprudent.—But can I keep it? Is it not to endanger all that I have worked for, my whole life through?—[*Whispering.*] Oh, could I but cheat the Evil One, only this one more time! [*Listens.*] What was that? [*Calls.*] Viliam, Viliam!

SIRA VILIAM *enters from the right.*

BISHOP NICHOLAS. What is it that whistles and howls so grimly?

SIRA VILIAM. 'Tis the storm; it grows fiercer.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The storm grows fiercer! Ay truly, I will keep my promise! The storm, say you——? Are they singing in there?

SIRA VILIAM. Yes, my lord.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Bid them bestir themselves, and chiefly brother Aslak; he always makes such scant prayers; he shirks whenever he can; he skips, the hound! [*Strikes the floor with his crozier.*] Go in and say to him 'tis the last night I have left; he shall bestir himself, else will I haunt him from the dead!

SIRA VILIAM. My lord, shall I not fetch Master Sigard?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Go in, I say! [*VILIAM goes into the chapel.*] It must doubtless be heaven's will that I should reconcile the King and the Duke, since it sends me Trond's letter now. This is a hard thing, Nicholas; to tear down at a single wrench what you have spent your life in building up. But there is no other way; I must e'en do the will of heaven this time.—If I could only read what is written in the letter! But I cannot see a word! Mists drive before my eyes; they sparkle and flicker; and I dare let none other read it for me! To make such a promise——! Is human cunning, then, so poor a thing that it cannot govern the outcome of its contrivances. Had I yet time before me——! but only the space of one night, and scarce even that. I must, I will live longer! [*Knocks with his crozier; a priest enters from the right.*] Bid Master Sigard come! [*The priest goes; the BISHOP crushes the letter in his hands.*] Here, under this thin seal, lies Norway's saga for a hundred years! It lies and dreams, like the birdling in the egg! Oh, that I had more souls than one—or else none! [*Presses the letter wildly to his breast.*] Oh, were not the end so close upon me,—and judgment and doom, I would hatch you out into a hawk that should cast the dreadful shadow of his wings over all the land, and strike his sharp talons into every heart! [*With a sudden shudder.*] But the last hour is at hand! [*Shrieking.*] No, no! You shall become a swan, a white swan! [*Throws the letter far from him, on to the floor, and calls:*] Master Sigard, Master Sigard!

MASTER SIGARD. [*From the right.*] How can I serve you, honoured lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Master Sigard—sell me three days' life!

MASTER SIGARD. I have told you——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Yes, yes; but that was in jest; 'twas a little revenge on me. I have been a tedious master to you; therefore you thought to scare me. Fie, that was evil,—nay, nay—'twas no more than I deserved! But, now be good and kind! I will pay you well;—three days' life, Master Sigard, only three days' life!

MASTER SIGARD. Though I myself were to die in the same hour as you, yet could I not add three days to your span.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. One day, then, only one day! Let it be light, let the sun shine when my soul sets forth! Listen, Sigard! [*Beckons him over, and drags him down upon the couch.*] I have given well-nigh all my gold and silver to the Church, to have high masses sung for me. I will take it back again; you shall have it all! How now, Sigard, shall we two fool them in there? He-he-he! You will be rich, Sigard, and can depart the country; I shall have time to cast about me a little, and make shift with fewer prayers. Come, Sigard, shall we——! [SIGARD feels his pulse; the BISHOP exclaims anxiously:] How now, why answer you not?

MASTER SIGARD. [*Rising.*] I have no time, my lord. I must prepare you a draught that may ease you somewhat at the last.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Nay, wait with that! Wait,—and answer me!

MASTER SIGARD. I have no time; the draught must be ready within an hour. [*Goes out to the right.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Within an hour! [*Knocks wildly.*] Viliam! Viliam!

[SIRA VILIAM comes out from the chapel.]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Call more to help in there! The eight are not enough!

SIRA VILIAM. My lord——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. More to help, I say! Brother Kolbein has lain sick these five weeks,—he cannot have sinned much in that time——

SIRA VILIAM. He was at shrift yesterday.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Eagerly.*] Ay, he must be good; call him! [*VILIAM goes into the chapel again.*] Within an hour! [*Dries the sweat off his brow.*] Pah—how hot it is here!—The miserable hound—what boots all his learning, when he cannot add an hour to my life? There sits he in his closet day by day, piecing together his cunning wheels and weights and levers; he thinks to fashion a machine that shall go and go and never stop—*perpetuum mobile* he calls it. Why not rather turn his art and his skill to making man such a *perpetuum mobile*? [*Stops and thinks; his eyes light up.*] *Perpetuum mobile*,—I am not strong in Latin—but it means somewhat that has power to work eternally, through all the ages. If I myself, now, could but——? That were a deed to end my life withal! That were to do my greatest deed in my latest hour! To set wheel and weight and lever at work in the King's soul and the Duke's; to set them a-going so that no power on earth can stop them; if I can but do that, then shall I live indeed, live in my work—and, when I think of it, mayhap 'tis that which is called immortality.—Comfortable, soothing thoughts, how ye do the old man good! [*Draws a deep breath, and stretches himself comfortably upon the couch.*] Diabolus has pressed me hard to-night. That comes of lying idle; *otium est pulvis—pulveris*—pooh, no matter for the Latin—— Diabolus shall no longer have

power over me; I will be busy to the last; I will——; how they bellow in yonder—— [*Knocks; VILIAM comes out.*] Tell them to hold their peace; they disturb me. The King and the Duke will soon be here; I have weighty matters to ponder.

SIRA VILIAM. My lord, shall I then——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Bid them hold awhile, that I may think in peace. Look you, take up yonder letter that lies upon the floor.—Good.

SIRA VILIAM. [*Goes to the writing-table.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. It matters not—— So; go now in and bid them be silent. [*VILIAM goes.*] To die, and yet rule in Norway! To die, and yet so contrive things that no man may come to raise his head above the rest. A thousand ways may lead towards that goal; yet can there be but one that will reach it;—and now to find that one—to find it and follow it—— Ha! The way lies so close, so close at hand! Ay, so it must be. I will keep my promise; the Duke shall have the letter in his hands;—but the King—he shall have the thorn of doubt in his heart. Haakon is upright, as they call it; many things will go to wreck in his soul along with the faith in himself and in his right. Both of them shall doubt and believe by turns, still swaying to and fro, and finding no firm ground beneath their feet—*perpetuum mobile!*—But will Haakon believe what I say? Ay, that will he; am I not a dying man?—And to prepare the way I will feed him up with truths.—My strength fails, but fresh life fills my soul;—I no longer lie on a sick-bed, I sit in my workroom; I will work the last night through, work—till the light goes out——

DUKE SKULE. [*Enters from the right and advances towards the BISHOP.*] Peace and greeting, my honoured lord! I hear it goes ill with you.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. I am a corpse in the bud, good Duke; this night shall I break into bloom.

DUKE SKULE. Already to-night, say you?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Master Sigard says: within an hour.

DUKE SKULE. And Trond the Priest's letter——?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Think you still upon that?

DUKE SKULE. 'Tis never out of my thoughts.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. The King has made you Duke; before you, no man in Norway has borne that title.

DUKE SKULE. 'Tis not enough. If Haakon be not the rightful king, then must I have all!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ha, 'tis cold in here; the blood runs icy through my limbs.

DUKE SKULE. Trond the Priest's letter, my lord! For Almighty God's sake,—have you it?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. At least, I know where it may be found.

DUKE SKULE. Tell me then, tell me!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Wait——

DUKE SKULE. Nay, nay—lose not your time; I see it draws to an end;—and 'tis said the King comes hither.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ay, the King comes; thereby you may best see that I am mindful of your cause, even now.

DUKE SKULE. What is your purpose?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Mind you, at the King's bridal—you said that Haakon's strength lay in his steadfast faith in himself?

DUKE SKULE. Well?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. If I confess, and raise a doubt in his mind, then his faith will fall, and his strength with it.

DUKE SKULE. My lord, this is sinful, sinful, if he be the rightful king.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. 'Twill be in your power to restore his faith. Ere I depart hence, I will tell you where Trond the Priest's letter may be found.

SIRA VILIAM. [*From the right.*] The King is now coming up the street, with torch-bearers and attendants.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. He shall be welcome. [VILIAM goes.] Duke, I beg of you one last service: do you carry on my feuds against all mine enemies. [*Takes out a letter.*] Here I have written them down. Those whose names stand first I would fain have hanged, if it could be so ordered.

DUKE SKULE. Think not upon vengeance now; you have but little time left——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Not on vengeance, but on punishment. Promise me to wield the sword of punishment over all mine enemies when I am gone. They are your foemen no less than mine; when you are King you must chastise them; do you promise me that?

DUKE SKULE. I promise and swear it; but Trond's letter——!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. You shall learn where it is;—but see—the King comes; hide the list of our foemen!

[*The Duke hides the paper; at the same moment HAAKON enters from the right.*]

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Well met at the grave-feast, my lord King.

HAAKON. You have ever withstood me stubbornly; but that shall be forgiven and forgotten now; death wipes out even the heaviest reckoning.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. That lightened my soul! Oh how marvellous is the King's clemency! My lord, what you have done for an old sinner this night shall be tenfold——

HAAKON. No more of that; but I must tell you that I greatly marvel you should summon me hither to obtain my forgiveness, and yet prepare for me such a meeting as this.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Meeting, my lord?

DUKE SKULE. 'Tis of me the King speaks. Will you, my lord Bishop, assure King Haakon, by my faith and honour, that I knew nought of his coming, ere I landed at Oslo wharf?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Alas, alas! The blame is all mine! I have been sickly and bedridden all the last year; I have learnt little or nought of the affairs of the kingdom; I thought all was now well between the princely kinsmen!

HAAKON. I have marked that the friendship between the Duke and myself thrives best when we hold aloof from one another; therefore farewell, Bishop Nicholas, and God be with you where you are now to go.

[Goes towards the door.]

DUKE SKULE. *[Softly and uneasily.]* Bishop, Bishop, he is going!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. *[Suddenly and with wild energy.]* Stay, King Haakon!

HAAKON. *[Stops.]* What now?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. You shall not leave this room until old Bishop Nicholas has spoken his last word!

HAAKON. *[Instinctively lays his hand upon his sword.]* Mayhap you have come well attended to Viken, Duke.

DUKE SKULE. I have no part in this.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. 'Tis by force of words that I will hold you. Where there is a burial in the house, the dead

man ever rules; he can do and let alone as he will—so far as his power may reach. Therefore will I now speak my own funeral-speech; in days gone by, I was ever sore afraid lest King Sverre should come to speak it——

HAAKON. Talk not so wildly, my lord!

DUKE SKULE. You shorten the precious hour still left to you!

HAAKON. Your eyes are already dim!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ay, my sight is dim; I scarce can see you where you stand; but before my inward eye, my life is moving in a blaze of light. There I see sights——; hear and learn, O King!—My race was the mightiest in the land; many great chieftains had sprung from it; I longed to be the greatest of them all. I was yet but a boy when I began to thirst after great deeds; meseemed I could by no means wait till I were grown. Kings arose who had less right than I,—Magnus Erlingsson, Sverre the Priest——; I also would be king; but I must needs be a chieftain first. Then came the battle at Ilevoldene; 'twas the first time I went out to war. The sun went up, and glittering lightnings flashed from a thousand burnished blades. Magnus and all his men advanced as to a game; I alone felt a tightness at my heart. Fiercely our host swept forward; but I could not follow—I was afraid! I was afraid;—born to be a chieftain—and afraid! It fell upon me as a thunderbolt; from that hour I hated all men. A coward, a coward—and yet was I filled with longing to be a chief, to be a king; nay, I felt I was born to be King. I could have furthered God's kingdom upon earth; but 'twas the saints themselves that barred the way for me.

HAAKON. Accuse not Heaven, Bishop Nicholas! You have hated much.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Ay, I have hated much; hated every head in this land that raised itself above the crowd. So I became a priest: king or priest must that man be who would have all might in his hands. [*Laughs.*] I a priest! I a churchman! Now it is over; my soul has fresh marrow in its bones; *I* have not sinned; it is *I* that have suffered wrong; *I* am the accuser!

DUKE SKULE. [*Softly.*] My lord—the letter! You have little time left.

HAAKON. Think of your soul, and humble you!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. A man's life-work is his soul, and my life-work still shall live upon the earth. But you, King Haakon, you should beware; for as Heaven has stood against me, and reaped harm for its reward, so are you standing against the man who holds the country's welfare in his hand——

HAAKON. Ha—Duke, Duke! Now I see the bent of this meeting!

DUKE SKULE. [*Vehemently, to the BISHOP.*] Not a word more of this!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*To HAAKON.*] He will stand against you so long as his head sits fast on his shoulders. Share with him! I will have no peace in my coffin, I will rise again, if you two share not the kingdom! Neither of you shall add the other's height to his own stature. If that befell, there would be a giant in the land, and here shall no giant be; for I was never a giant!

[*Sinks back exhausted on the couch.*]

DUKE SKULE. [*Falls on his knees beside the couch and cries to HAAKON.*] Summon help! For God's pity's sake; the Bishop must not die yet!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. How it waxes dusk before my eyes!—King, for the last time—will you share with the Duke?

HAAKON. Not a shred will I let slip of that which God gave me.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Well and good. [*Softly.*] Your faith, at least, you shall let slip. [*Calls.*] Viliam!

DUKE SKULE. [*Softly.*] The letter! The letter!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Not listening to him.*] Viliam! [*Viliam enters; the BISHOP draws him close down to him and whispers.*] When I received the Extreme Unction, all my sins were forgiven me?

SIRA VILIAM. All your sins from your birth, till the moment you received the Unction.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. No longer? Not until the very end?

SIRA VILIAM. You will not sin to-night, my lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Who can tell—? Take the golden goblet Bishop Absalom left me—give it to the Church—and say seven high masses more.

SIRA VILIAM. God will be gracious to you, my lord!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Seven more masses, I say—for sins I may commit to-night! Go, go! [*Viliam goes; the BISHOP turns to SKULE.*] Duke, if you should come to read Trond the Priest's letter, and it should mayhap prove that Haakon is the rightful king—what would you do then?

DUKE SKULE. In God's name—king he should remain.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Bethink you; much is at stake. Search every fold of your heart; answer as though you stood before your Judge! What will you do, if he be the rightful king?

DUKE SKULE. Bow my head and serve him.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Mumbles.*] So, so: then bide the issue. [*To SKULE.*] Duke, I am weak and weary; a mild and charitable mood comes over me——

DUKE SKULE. It is death! Trond the Priest's letter! Where is it?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. First another matter;—I gave you the list of my enemies——

DUKE SKULE. [*Impatiently.*] Yes, yes; I will take full revenge upon them——

BISHOP NICHOLAS. No, my soul is filled with mildness; I will forgive, as the Scripture commands. As you would forego might, I will forego revenge. Burn the list!

DUKE SKULE. Ay, ay; as you will.

BISHOP NICHOLAS. Here, in the brazier; so that I may see it——

DUKE SKULE. [*Throws the paper into the fire.*] There, then; see, it burns. And now, speak, speak. You risk thousands of lives if you speak not now!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*With sparkling eyes.*] Thousands of lives. [*Shrieks.*] Light! Air!

HAAKON. [*Rushes to the door and cries.*] Help! The Bishop is dying!

SIRA VILIAM and several of the BISHOP's men enter.

DUKE SKULE. [*Shakes the BISHOP's arm.*] You risk Norway's happiness through hundreds of years, mayhap its greatness to all eternity!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. To all eternity! [*Triumphantly.*] *Perpetuum mobile!*

DUKE SKULE. By our soul's salvation,—where is Trond the Priest's letter?

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Calls.*] Seven more masses, William!

DUKE SKULE. [*Beside himself.*] The letter! The letter!

BISHOP NICHOLAS. [*Smiling in his death-agony.*] 'Twas it you burned, good Duke!

[*Falls back on the couch and dies.*]

DUKE SKULE. [*With an involuntary cry, starts backwards and covers his face with his hands.*] Almighty God!

THE MONKS. [*Rushing in flight from the chapel.*] Save you, all who can!

SOME VOICES. The powers of evil have broken loose!

All, *ad lib.*

END OF SCENE FIRST.

SCENE SECOND.

A room in the Palace. In the back is the entrance door; in each of the side walls a smaller door; in front, on the right, a window. Hung from the roof, a lamp is burning.

A short pause. DUKE SKULE enters from the back.

MARGRETE. [*Starts up with a cry of joy and rushes to meet him.*] My father!

DUKE SKULE. God's peace be with you, Margrete! Where is the King?

MARGRETE. With Bishop Nicholas.

DUKE SKULE. Ha,—then must he soon be here.

MARGRETE. And you will talk together and be at one, be friends again, as in the old days?

DUKE SKULE. That would I gladly.

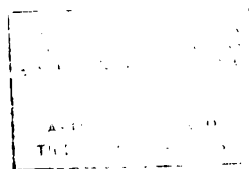
MARGRETE. 'Twould rejoice Haakon no less; and I pray to God every day that so it may be. Oh, but come hither and see——

[Takes his hand and leads him to the cradle; then goes out to the right.]

DUKE SKULE. Haakon will have sons, the Bishop foretold. [*Listens and goes to the window.*] Is not that the King? Ay; he is going up the other stair. [*After a short and gloomy silence.*] Haakon has a son. His race shall live after him. If he die, he leaves an heir who stands nearer the throne than all others. All things thrive with



THOMAS LAWRASON RIGGS, 1910,
as Margrete.



Haakon. Mayhap he is not the rightful king; but his faith in himself stands firm as ever; the Bishop would have shaken it, but Death gave him not time, God gave him not leave. Now must I follow the Bishop's counsel; now or never! Here are we both in Oslo; this time I have more men than Haakon; why not seize the advantage—'tis so seldom on my side. [*Vacillating.*] But to-night——? At once——? No, no! Not to-night! Ha-ha-ha—there again!—pondering, wavering! Haakon knows not what that means; he goes straight forward, and so he conquers! [*Going up the room, stops suddenly beside the cradle.*] The King-child!—Should Haakon die before me, this child will be raised to the throne; and I—I shall stand humbly before him, and bow low and hail him as king! [*In rising agitation.*] This child, Haakon's son, shall sit on high, on the seat that should in right, mayhap, be mine—and I shall stand before his footstool, white-haired and bowed with age, and see my whole life-work lying undone—die without having been king!—I have more men than Haakon—there blows a storm to-night, and the wind sweeps down the fiord——! If I took the King-child? I am safe with the Trönders. [*Enter HAAKON.*] King Haakon, this time we must not part as foes. All evil will follow; there will fall a time of dread upon the land.

HAAKON. The land has known nought else through many generations; but, see you, God is with me; every foeman falls that would stand against me,—from whom, then, should the time of dread come now?

DUKE SKULE. Haakon, I fear me it might come from me!

HAAKON. When I came to the throne, I gave you the third part of the kingdom——

DUKE SKULE. But kept two-thirds yourself!

HAAKON. I made you Duke; one-third of the kingdom had no man in Norway before you.

DUKE SKULE. But you are king! I must have no king over me! I was not born to serve you; I must rule in my own right!

HAAKON. Oh, blinded man! I cannot but pity you. You think 'tis the Lord's calling that draws you toward the throne; you see not that 'tis nought but pride of heart. What is it that allures you? The royal circlet, the purple-bordered mantle, the right to be seated three steps above the floor;—pitiful, pitiful! Were that kingship, I would cast it into your hat, as I cast a groat to a beggar.

DUKE SKULE. Party must stand against party, claim against claim, region against region, if the king is to have the might. Every village, every family, must either need him or fear him.

HAAKON. And you would be king—you, who think such thoughts! You had been well fitted for a chieftain's part in Erling Skakke's days; but the time has grown away from you, and you know it not. See you not, then, that Norway's realm, as Harald and Olaf built it up, may be likened to a church that stands as yet unconsecrate? The walls soar aloft with mighty buttresses, the vaultings have a noble span, the spire points upward, like a fir-tree in the forest; but the life, the throbbing heart, the fresh blood-stream, is lacking to the work; God's living spirit is not breathed into it; it stands unconsecrate.—*I will bring consecration!* Norway has been a kingdom, it shall become a people. The Trönder has stood against the man of Viken, the Agdeman against the Hordalander, the Halogalander against the Sogndalesman; all shall be one hereafter, and

all shall feel and know that they are one! That is the task which God has laid on my shoulders; that is the work which now lies before the King of Norway.

DUKE SKULE. [*Impressed.*] To unite——? To unite the Trönders and the men of Viken,—all Norway——? [*Skeptically.*] 'Tis impossible! Norway's saga tells of no such thing!

HAAKON. For you 'tis impossible, for you can but work out the old saga afresh; for me, 'tis as easy as for the falcon to cleave the clouds.

DUKE SKULE. [*In uneasy agitation.*] To unite the whole people—to awaken it so that it shall know itself one! Whence got you so strange a thought? It runs through me like ice and fire. [*Vehemently.*] It comes from the devil, Haakon; it shall never be carried through while I have strength to buckle on my helm.

HAAKON. 'Tis from God the thought comes to me, and never shall I let it slip while I bear St. Olaf's circlet on my brow!

DUKE SKULE. Then must St. Olaf's circlet fall from your brow!

HAAKON. Who will make it fall?

DUKE SKULE. I, if none other.

HAAKON. [*Points to the door.*] Go, my lord—and be it forgotten that we have spoken with sharp tongues this night.

DUKE SKULE. [*Looks hard at him for a moment, and says:*] Next time, 'twill be with sharper tongues we speak.

[*Goes to the back.*]

HAAKON. [*After a short pause.*] He threatens! No, no, it cannot come to that. He must, he shall give way; I have need of that strong arm, that cunning brain.—What-

soever courage and wisdom and strength there may be in this land, all gifts that God has endowed men withal, are but granted them to my uses. For my service did all noble gifts fall to Duke Skule's share; to defy me is to defy Heaven; 'tis my duty to punish whosoever shall set himself up against Heaven's will—for Heaven has done so much for me.

DAGFINN THE PEASANT. [*Enters from the back.*] Be on your guard to-night, my lord; the Duke has surely evil in his mind.

HAAKON. What say you?

DAGFINN. What may be his drift, I know not; but sure am I that something is brewing.

HAAKON. Can he think to fall upon us? Impossible, impossible!

DAGFINN. No, 'tis something else. His ships lie clear for sailing; he has summoned an Assembly on board them.

HAAKON. You must mistake——! Go, Dagfinn, and bring me sure tidings.

DAGFINN. Ay ay, trust to me. [*Goes.*]

HAAKON. No,—'tis not to be thought of! The Duke dare not rise against me. God will not suffer it—God, who has hitherto guided all things for me so marvellously. I must have peace now, for 'tis now I must set about my work—I have done so little yet; but I hear the unerring voice of the Lord calling to me: Thou shalt do a great king's-work in Norway!

GREGORIUS JONSSON. [*Enters from the back.*] My lord and King!

HAAKON. Gregorius Jonsson! Come you hither?

GREGORIUS JONSSON. I offer myself for your service. Thus far have I followed the Duke; but now I dare follow him no further.

HAAKON. What has befallen?

GREGORIUS JONSSON. That which no man will believe, when 'tis rumoured through the land.

HAAKON. Speak, speak!

GREGORIUS JONSSON. I tremble to hear the sound of my own words; know then——

[He seizes the KING's arm and whispers.]

HAAKON. *[Starts backwards with a cry.]* Ha, are you distraught?

GREGORIUS JONSSON. Would to God I were.

HAAKON. Unheard of! No, it cannot be true!

GREGORIUS JONSSON. By Christ's dear blood, so is it!

HAAKON. Go, go; sound the trumpet-call for my guard; get all my men under arms. *[GREGORIUS JONSSON goes.]*

DAGFINN THE PEASANT. *[Enters hastily from the back.]* My lord, my lord! The worst has befallen! Earl Skule has proclaimed himself King!

HAAKON. *[Smiles confidently while he holds MARGRETE and INGA closely to him.]* I know it; but there is nought to fear, good Dagfinn! If there be two kings in Norway, there is but one in Heaven—and He will set all straight!

END OF ACT THIRD.

ACT FOURTH.

SCENE FIRST.

The great hall in Oslo Palace. KING SKULE is feasting with the Guard and his Chiefs. In front, on the left, stands the throne, where SKULE sits, richly attired, with a purple mantle and the royal circlet on his head. The supper-table, by which the guests are seated, stretches from the throne towards the background. Opposite to SKULE sit PAUL FLIDA and BAARD BRATTE. Some of the humbler guests are standing, to the right. It is late evening; the hall is brightly lighted. The banquet is drawing to a close; the men are very merry, and some of them drunk; they drink to each other, laugh, and all talk together.

PAUL FLIDA. [*Rises and strikes the table.*] Silence in the hall; Jatgeir Skald will say forth his song in honour of King Skule.

JATGEIR. [*Stands out in the middle of the floor.*]

Duke Skule he summoned the Orething
when 'twas mass-time in Nidaros town;
and the bells rang and swords upon bucklers
clashed bravely
when Duke Skule he donned the crown.

King Skule marched over the Dovrefjeld,
his host upon snow-shoes sped;
the Gudbranddalesman he grovelled for grace,
but his hoard must e'en ransom his head.

'Twas all in the holy Shrove-tide week
we met with the Birchleg horde;
Earl Knut was their captain—the swords with
loud tongue
in the suit for the throne made award.

They took to their heels did the Birchenlegs,
flinging from them both buckler and bill there;
many hundreds, though, took to their heels
nevermore,
for they lay and were icily chill there.

No man knows where King Haakon hideth;—
King Skule stands safe at the helm.
All hail and long life to thee, lord, in thy state
as King of all Norway's realm!

SKULE'S MEN. [*Spring up with loud jubilation, hold
goblets and beakers aloft, clash their weapons, and repeat:*

All hail and long life to thee, lord, in thy state
as King of all Norway's realm!

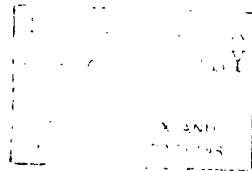
KING SKULE. Thanks for the song, Jatgeir Skald! 'Tis
as I best like it; for it gives my men no less praise than
myself.

JATGEIR. The King is honoured when his men are
praised.

were so immovably assured of right and victory and fortune. To have no creature with whom I may speak of all that gnaws me so sorely. [*Rises with a look of terror.*] And the battle at Laaka! That I should have conquered there! Haakon sent his host against me; God was to judge and award between the two kings—and I conquered, conquered, as never any before has conquered the Birchlegs! Their shields stood upright in the snow, but there was none behind them—the Birchlegs took to the woods, and fled over upland and moor and lea as far as their legs would carry them. The unbelievable came to pass; Haakon lost and I won. There is a secret horror in that victory. Thou great God of Heaven! there rules, then, no certain law on high, that all things must obey? The right carries with it no conquering might? [*With a change of tone, wildly.*] I am sick, I am sick!—When the thought of the kingly right comes over me unawares, 'tis ever he, not I, that is the true king. When I would see myself as the true king, I must do it with forethought, I must build up a whole fabric of subtleties, a work of cunning; I must hold memories aloof, and take faith by storm. It was not so before. What has befallen to fill me so full of doubt? The burning of the letter? No—that made the uncertainty eternal, but did not add to it. [*Seats himself on the right.*] What is it? Ha, strange! It comes and goes like a marsh-fire; it dances at the tip of my tongue, as when one has lost a word and cannot find it. [*Springs up.*] Ha! Now I have it! No——! Yes, yes! Now I have it!—"Norway has been a kingdom, it shall become a people; all shall be one, and all shall feel and know that they are one!" Since Haakon spoke those madman's words, he stands ever before me as the rightful king. [*Whispers with fixed and appre-*



THOMAS ACHELIS, 1908,
as Earl Skule.



hensive gaze.] What if God's calling glimmered through these strange words? If God had garnered up the thought till now, and would now strew it forth—and had chosen Haakon for his sower?

PAUL FLIDA. [*Enters from the back.*] My lord King, I have tidings for you.

KING SKULE. Tidings?

PAUL FLIDA. A man who comes from down the fiord brings news that the Birchlegs in Tunsberg have launched their ships, and that many men have gathered in the town in these last days.

KING SKULE. Good, we will go forth to meet them—to-morrow or the day after.

PAUL FLIDA. It might chance, my lord King, that the Birchlegs had a mind to meet us first.

KING SKULE. They have not ships enough for that, nor men.

PAUL FLIDA. Shall I send forth scouts to Hoved-isle?

KING SKULE. 'Tis needless; the night is dark, and there is a sea-fog to boot.

PAUL FLIDA. Well well, the King knows best; but bethink you, my lord, that all men are against you here in Viken. The townsfolk of Oslo hate you, and should the Birchlegs come, they will make common cause with them.

KING SKULE. [*With animation.*] Paul Flida, were it not possible that I could win over the men of Viken to my side?

PAUL FLIDA. [*Looks at him in astonishment, and shakes his head.*] No, my lord, it is not possible.

KING SKULE. And wherefore not?

PAUL FLIDA. Why, for that you have the Trönders on your side.

KING SKULE. I will have both the Trönders and the men of Viken!

PAUL FLIDA. Nay, my lord, that cannot be!

KING SKULE. Not possible! cannot be! And wherefore—wherefore not?

PAUL FLIDA. Because the man of Viken is the man of Viken, and the Trönder is the Trönder; because so it has always been, and no saga tells of a time when it was otherwise.

KING SKULE. Ay, ay—you are right. Go.

PAUL FLIDA. And send forth no scouts?

KING SKULE. Wait till daybreak. [PAUL FLIDA goes.] Norway's saga tells of no such thing; it has never been so yet; Paul Flida answers me as I answered Haakon. Are there, then, upward as well as downward steps? Stands Haakon as high over me as I over Paul Flida? Has Haakon an eye for unborn thoughts, that is lacking in me? [*Vehemently.*] Since Haakon uttered his great king-thought, I can see no other thought in the world but that only. If I cannot take it and act it out, I see no other thought to fight for. [*Brooding.*] And can I not make it mine? If I cannot, whence comes my great love for Haakon's thought?

JATGEIR. [*Enters from the back.*] Forgive my coming, lord King—

KING SKULE. You come to my wish, Skald!

JATGEIR. I overheard some townsfolk at my lodging talking darkly of—

KING SKULE. Let that wait. Tell me, Skald: you who have fared far abroad in strange lands, have you ever seen a woman love another's child? Not only have kindness for it—'tis not that I mean; but love it, love it with the warmest passion of her soul.

JATGEIR. That do only those women who have no child of their own to love.

KING SKULE. Only those women——?

JATGEIR. And chiefly women who are barren.

KING SKULE. Chiefly the barren——? They love the children of others with all their warmest passions?

JATGEIR. That will oftentimes befall.

KING SKULE. And does it not sometimes befall that such a barren woman will slay another's child, because she herself has none?

JATGEIR. Ay, ay; but in that she does unwisely.

KING SKULE. Unwisely?

JATGEIR. Ay, for she gives the gift of sorrow to her whose child she slays.

KING SKULE. Think you the gift of sorrow is a great good?

JATGEIR. Yes, lord.

KING SKULE. Ha. [*A short pause.*] Tell me, Jatgeir, how came you to be a skald? Who taught you skaldcraft?

JATGEIR. Skaldcraft cannot be taught, my lord.

KING SKULE. Cannot be taught? How came it then?

JATGEIR. The gift of sorrow came to me, and I was a skald.

KING SKULE. Then 'tis the gift of sorrow the skald has need of?

JATGEIR. I needed sorrow; others there may be who need faith, or joy—or doubt——

KING SKULE. Doubt as well?

JATGEIR. Ay; but then must the doubter be strong and sound.

KING SKULE. And whom call you the unsound doubter?

JATGEIR. He who doubts of his own doubt.

KING SKULE. [*Slowly.*] That, methinks, were death.

JATGEIR. 'Tis worse; 'tis neither day nor night.

KING SKULE. [*Quickly, as if shaking off his thoughts.*] Where are my weapons? I will fight and act—not think. What was it you would have told me when you came?

JATGEIR. 'Twas what I noted in my lodging. The townsmen whisper together secretly, and laugh mockingly, and ask if we be well assured that King Haakon is in the westland; there is somewhat they are in glee over.

KING SKULE. They are men of Viken, and therefore against me.

JATGEIR. They scoff because King Olaf's shrine could not be brought out to the mote-stead when you were chosen king; they say it boded ill.

KING SKULE. When next I come to Nidaros, the shrine shall out! It shall stand under the open sky, though I should have to tear down St. Olaf's church and widen out the mote-stead over the spot where it stood.

JATGEIR. That were a strong deed; but I shall make a song of it, as strong as the deed itself.

KING SKULE. [*After a pause.*] The Iclander is in very deed a skald. He speaks God's deepest truth and knows it not—I am as a barren woman. Therefore I love Haakon's kingly thought-child, love it with the warmest passion of my soul. Oh, that I could but adopt it! It would die in my hands. Which were best, that it should die in my hands, or wax great in his? Should I ever have peace of soul if that came to pass? Can I forgo all? Can I stand by and see Haakon make himself famous for all time! How dead and empty is all within me—and around me. Who gave you the gift of sorrow, Jatgeir?

JATGEIR. She whom I loved.

KING SKULE. She died, then.

JATGEIR. No, she deceived me.

KING SKULE. And then you became a skald?

JATGEIR. Ay, then I became a skald.

KING SKULE. [*Seizes him by the arm.*] What gift do I need to become a king?

JATGEIR. Not the gift of doubt; else would you not question so.

KING SKULE. What gift do I need?

JATGEIR. My lord, you are a king.

KING SKULE. Have you at all times full faith that you are a skald?

JATGEIR. [*Looks silently at him for a while, and asks:*] Have you never loved?

KING SKULE. Yes, once—burningly, blissfully, and in sin. Had I a son, I would not ask you what gift I need. [*Vehemently.*] I must have some one by me who sinks his own will utterly in mine—who believes in me unflinchingly, who will cling close to me in good hap and ill, who lives only to shed light and warmth over my life, and must die if I fall.

JATGEIR. Buy yourself a dog, my lord.

KING SKULE. But I must—I must have one who can trust in me! Only one! I feel it—had I that one, I were saved!

JATGEIR. Trust in yourself and you will be saved!

PAUL FLIDA. [*Enters hastily.*] King Skule, look to yourself! Haakon Haakonsson lies off Elgjarness with all his fleet!

KING SKULE. Off Elgjarness——! Then he is close at hand.

JATGEIR. Get we to arms then! If there be bloodshed to-night, I will gladly be the first to die for you!

KING SKULE. You, who would not live for me!

JATGEIR. A man can die for another's life-work; but if he go on living, he must live for his own. [*Goes.*]

PAUL FLIDA. [*Impatiently.*] Your commands, my lord! The Birchlegs may be in Oslo this very hour.

KING SKULE. 'Twere best if we could fare to St. Thomas Beckett's grave; he has helped so many a sorrowful and penitent soul.

PAUL FLIDA. [*More forcibly.*] My lord, speak not so wildly now; I tell you, the Birchlegs are upon us!

KING SKULE. Let all the churches be opened, that we may betake us thither and find grace.

PAUL FLIDA. You can crush all your foemen at one stroke, and yet would betake you to the churches!

KING SKULE. Yes, yes, keep all the churches open!

PAUL FLIDA. Be sure Haakon will break sanctuary, when 'tis Vaarbælg he pursues.

KING SKULE. That will he not; God will shield him from such a sin;—God always shields Haakon.

PAUL FLIDA. [*In deep and sorrowful wrath.*] To hear you speak thus, a man could not but ask: Who is king in this land?

KING SKULE. [*Smiling mournfully.*] Ay, Paul Flida, that is the great question: Who is king in this land?

PAUL FLIDA. [*Imploringly.*] You are soul-sick to-night, my lord; let me act for you.

KING SKULE. Ay, ay, do so.

PAUL FLIDA. [*Going.*] First will I break down all the bridges.

KING SKULE. Madman! Stay!—Break down all the bridges! Know you what that means? *I* have assayed it;—beware of that!

PAUL FLIDA. What would you then, my lord?

KING SKULE. I will talk with Haakon.

PAUL FLIDA. He will answer you with a tongue of steel.

KING SKULE. Go, go;—you shall learn my will anon.

PAUL FLIDA. Every moment is precious! [*Seizes his hand.*] King Skule, let us break down all the bridges, fight like wolves, and trust in Heaven!

KING SKULE. [*Softly.*] Heaven trusts not in me; I dare not trust in Heaven.

PAUL FLIDA. Short has been the saga of the Vargbælgs.

[*Goes out by the back.*]

KING SKULE. A hundred cunning heads, a thousand mighty arms, are at my beck; but not a single loving, trusting heart. That is kingly beggary; no more, no less.

BAARD BRATTE. [*From the back.*] A wayfarer from afar stands without, praying to have speech with you, my lord.

KING SKULE. Who is he?

BAARD BRATTE. A young priest who presents this letter.

KING SKULE. Let the priest approach. [BAARD goes; KING SKULE *seats himself and reads:*] "This letter from one who loves you." [*To self.*] Then are you surely one of the dead. [*Reads:*] "It is borne to you by one dear to me, and is my last great sacrifice." [*Repeats to self, then looks at signature.*] Ingeborg!!! [*To self.*] You fair, you deeply loved, you greatly wronged woman. [*Reads:*] "My eyes have been but as rain clouds for twenty years. You would not know them again and you shall never see them more." [*To self.*] And meanwhile you, Ingeborg, have sat there in the north, guarding and treasuring your

memories in ice cold loneliness! And I could give you up to win might and riches. With you at my side, as my wife, I had found it easier to be King. [*Reads:*] "I have used my voice only to whisper your name, to imprint your greatness in a young heart. Receive the bearer of this letter as from my arms. He is our son, King Skule, yours and mine." [*To self.*] Our son. [*Reads:*] "Take him. For twenty years he has been the light and comfort of my heart. Now are you King of Norway. The King's son must enter on his heritage. I have no longer any right to him." [*To self.*] My son! He for whom I have longed so burningly. [*Reads:*] "Heavy is the sacrifice and scarce have I had strength to make it, but that Bishop Nicholas laid it on me, as an atonement for my sins." [*To self.*] Then is your sin blotted out and henceforth he is mine alone. [*Reads:*] "But one promise I crave for you." [*To self.*] Heaven and Earth, crave all you will. [*Reads:*] "He is pure as a lamb of God, as I now give him into your hands. 'Tis a perilous path that leads up to the throne; let him not take hurt to his soul"—[*To self.*] That I promise and swear. [*Reads:*] "From the moment you mark that his soul suffers harm, let him rather die." [*To self.*] Let him rather die! I promise and swear it. [*Reads:*] "Farewell. I will repent and pray till the Lord calls me. To love, to sacrifice all and be forgotten—that is my saga."

"INGEBORG."

PETER *enters.*

KING SKULE. Let me look at you! Ay, your mother's features and mine; you are he for whom I have longed so sorely.

PETER. [*Kneels.*] My father, my great, noble father! Let me love and fight for you! Let your cause be mine;

and be your cause what it may—I know that I am fighting for the right!

KING SKULE. [*With a cry of joy.*] You trust in me! You trust in me!

PETER. Immovably!

KING SKULE. Then all is well; then am I surely saved. Here to my heart, you for whom I have longed so burningly. My son! My son! I have a son! Ha! Ha! Who can stand against me now? Listen: you shall cast off the cowl; the Archbishop shall loose you from your vows; the King's son shall wield the sword, shall go forward unwavering to might and honour. Now shall a great king's-work be done in Norway! Listen, Peter, my son! We will awaken the whole people, and gather it into one; the man of Viken and the Trönder, the Halogalander and the Agdeman, the Uplander and the Sogndaleman, all shall be one great family! Then shall you see how the land will come to flourish!

PETER. What a great and dizzy thought——

KING SKULE. Do you grasp it?

PETER. Yes—yes!—Clearly——!

KING SKULE. And have you faith in it?

PETER. Yes, yes; for I have faith in you!

KING SKULE. [*Wildly.*] Haakon Haakonsson must die.

PETER. If you will it, then it is right that he die.

KING SKULE. 'Twill cost blood; but that we cannot heed!

PETER. The blood is not wasted that flows in your cause.

KING SKULE. All the might shall be yours when I have built up the kingdom. You shall sit on the throne with the circlet on your brow, with the purple mantle flowing wide over your shoulders; all men in the land shall bow before you—— [*The sounds of distant horns are heard.*] Ha! what was that? [*With a cry.*] The Birchleg host! What was it Paul Flida said——? [*Rushes towards the back.*]

PAUL FLIDA. [*Enters and cries.*] The hour is upon us, King Skule!

KING SKULE. [*Bewildered.*] The Birchlegs! King Haakon's host! Where are they?

PAUL FLIDA. They are swarming in thousands down over the Ekeberg.

KING SKULE. Sound the call to arms! Sound, sound! Give counsel; where shall we meet them?

PAUL FLIDA. All the churches stand open for us.

KING SKULE. 'Tis of the Birchlegs I ask——?

PAUL FLIDA. For them all the bridges stand open.

KING SKULE. Unhappy man, what have you done?

PAUL FLIDA. Obeyed my King!

KING SKULE. My son! My son! Woe is me; I have lost your kingdom!

PETER. No, you will conquer! So great a king's-thought cannot die!

KING SKULE. Peace, peace! [*Horns and shouts are heard, nearer at hand.*] To horse! To arms! More is here at stake than the life and death of men!

[*Rushes out by the back; the others follow him.*]

END OF ACT FOURTH.

ACT FIFTH.

SCENE FIRST.

A room in the palace at Nidaros. The entrance door is on the right; in front, on the same side, a window; to the left a smaller door. It is after night-fall. PAUL FLIDA, BAARD BRATTE, and several of KING SKULE'S principal followers are standing at the window and looking upward.

A MAN-AT-ARMS. How red it glows!

A SECOND. It stretches over half the sky, like a flaming sword.

BAARD BRATTE. Holy King Olaf, what bodes such a sign of dread?

AN OLD VAARBÆLG. Assuredly it bodes a great chief's death.

PAUL FLIDA. Haakon's death, my good Vaarbælgs. He is lying out in the fiord with his fleet; we may look for him in the town to-night. This time, 'tis our turn to conquer!

BAARD BRATTE. Trust not to that; there is little heart in the host now.

THE OLD VAARBÆLG. And reason enough, in sooth; ever since the flight from Oslo has King Skule shut himself in, and will neither see nor speak with his men.

THE FIRST MAN-AT-ARMS. There are those in the town who know not whether to believe him alive or dead.

PAUL FLIDA. The King must out, however sick he may be. Speak to him, Baard Bratte—the safety of all is at stake.

BAARD BRATTE. It avails not; I have spoken to him already.

PAUL FLIDA. Then must I try what I can do. [*Goes to the door on the left, and knocks.*] My lord King, you must take the helm in your own hands; things can no longer go on in this fashion.

KING SKULE. [*Within.*] I am sick, Paul Flida.

PAUL FLIDA. What else can you look for? You have eaten nought these two days; you must nourish and strengthen you——

KING SKULE. I am sick.

PAUL FLIDA. By the Almighty, 'tis no time for sickness. King Haakon lies out in the fiord, and may at any time be upon us here in Nidaros.

KING SKULE. Strike him down for me! Slay him and the King-child.

PAUL FLIDA. You must be with us, my lord!

KING SKULE. No, no, no,—you are surest of fortune and victory when I am not there.

PETER. [*Enters from the right; he is in armour.*] The townsfolk are ill at ease; they flock together in great masses before the palace.

BAARD BRATTE. Unless the King speak to them, they will desert him in the hour of need.

PETER. Then must he speak to them. [*At the door on the left.*] Father! The Trönders, your trustiest subjects, will fall away from you if you give them not courage.

KING SKULE. What said the skald?

PETER. The skald?

KING SKULE. The skald who died for my sake at Oslo. A man cannot give what he himself does not possess, he said.

PETER. Then neither can you give away the kingdom; for it is mine after you!

KING SKULE. Now I will come!

PAUL FLIDA. God be praised!

KING SKULE. [*Comes forward in the doorway; he is pale and haggard; his hair has grown very grey.*] You shall not look at me! I will not have you look at me now that I am sick! [*Goes up to PETER.*] Take from you the kingdom, you say? Great God in heaven, what was I about to do!

PETER. Oh, forgive me;—I know that what you do is ever the right.

KING SKULE. No, no, not hitherto; but now I will be strong and sound—I will act!

LOUD SHOUTS. [*Without on the right.*] King Skule! King Skule!

KING SKULE. What is that?

BAARD BRATTE. [*At the window.*] The townsmen are flocking together; the whole courtyard is full of people;—you must speak to them.

KING SKULE. Do I look like a king? Can I speak now?

PETER. You must, my noble father!

KING SKULE. Well, be it so. [*Goes to the window and draws the curtain aside, but lets it go quickly and starts back in terror.*] There hangs the flaming sword over me again!

PAUL FLIDA. It bodes that the sword of victory is drawn for you.

KING SKULE. Ah, were it but so! [*Goes to the win-*

dow and speaks out.] Trønders, what would you? Here stands your King.

A TOWNSMAN. [*Without.*] Leave the town! The Birchlegs will burn and slay if they find you here.

KING SKULE. We must all hold together. I have been a gracious King to you; I have craved but small war-tax——

A MAN'S VOICE. [*Down in the crowd.*] What call you all the blood, then, that flowed at Laaka and Oslo?

A BOY. Give me my father and my brother!

A MAN. He is no King; homage has not been done him on St. Olaf's shrine!

MANY VOICES. No, no—no homage has been done him on St. Olaf's shrine! He is no king!

KING SKULE. [*Shrinks behind the curtain.*] No homage——! No king!

PAUL FLIDA. 'Twas a dire mischance that the shrine was not brought forth when you were chosen.

BAARD BRATTE. Should the townsfolk desert us, we cannot hold Nidaros if the Birchlegs come.

KING SKULE. And they will desert us, so long as homage has not been done to me on the Saint's shrine.

PETER. Then let the shrine be brought forth, and take our homage now!

PAUL FLIDA. [*Shaking his head.*] How should that be possible?

PETER. Is aught impossible, where he is concerned? Sound the call for the folkmote, and bring forth the shrine!

SEVERAL OF THE MEN. [*Shrinking back.*] Sacrilege!

PETER. No sacrilege!—Come, come! The monks are well disposed towards King Skule; they will agree——

PAUL FLIDA. That will they not; they dare not, for the Archbishop.

PETER. Are you King's men, and will not lend your aid when so great a cause is at stake! Good, there are others below of better will. My father and King, the monks shall give way; I will pray, I will beseech; sound the summons for the folknote; you shall bear your kingship rightfully.

[Rushes out to the right.]

KING SKULE. *[Beaming with joy.]* Saw you him! Saw you my gallant son! How his eyes shone! Yes, we will all fight and conquer. How strong are the Birchlegs?

PAUL FLIDA. Not stronger than that we may master them, if but the townsfolk hold to us!

KING SKULE. They shall hold to us. We must all be at one now and put an end to this time of dread.

PAUL FLIDA. What are your commands?

KING SKULE. All the bridges shall be broken down!

PAUL FLIDA. Go, and let all the bridges be broken.

[One of the Men-at-arms goes out to the right.]

KING SKULE. Gather all our men upon the foreshore; not one Birchleg shall set foot in Nidaros.

PAUL FLIDA. Well spoken, King.

KING SKULE. When the shrine is borne forth, let the horn sound to the folknote. The host and the townsfolk shall be called together.

PAUL FLIDA. *[To one of the men.]* Go forth and bid the hornblower wind his horn in all the streets.

[The man goes.]

KING SKULE. *[Addresses the people from the window.]* Hold fast to me, all my sorrowing people. There shall

come peace and light over the land once more, as in Haakon's first glad days, when the fields yielded two harvests every summer. Hold fast to me; believe in me and trust to me; 'tis that I need so unspeakably. I will watch over you and fight for you; I will bleed and die for you, if need be; but fail me not, and doubt not——! [*Loud cries, as though of terror, are heard among the people.*] What is that?

A WILD VOICE. Atone! Atone!

BAARD BRATTE. [*Looks out.*] 'Tis a priest possessed of the devil!

PAUL FLIDA. He is tearing his cowl to shreds and scourging himself with a whip.

THE VOICE. Atone, atone! The last day is come.

MANY VOICES. Flee, flee! Woe upon Nidaros. A deed of sin!

KING SKULE. What has befallen?

BAARD BRATTE. All flee, all shrink away as though a wild beast were in their midst.

KING SKULE. Yes, all flee. [*With a cry of joy.*] Ha! it matters not. We are saved! See, see—King Olaf's shrine stands in the middle of the courtyard.

PAUL FLIDA. King Olaf's shrine!

BAARD BRATTE. Ay, by Heaven—there it stands!

KING SKULE. The monks are true to me; so good a deed have they never done before!

PAUL FLIDA. Hark! the call to the folkmote!

KING SKULE. Now shall lawful homage be done to me.

PETER. [*Enters from the right.*] Take on you the kingly mantle; now stands the shrine out yonder.

KING SKULE. Then have you saved the kingdom for me and for yourself; and tenfold will we thank the pious monks for yielding.

PETER. The monks, father—you have nought to thank them for.

KING SKULE. 'Twas not they that helped you?

PETER. They laid the ban of the Church on whoever should dare to touch the holy thing.

KING SKULE. The Archbishop then! At last he gives way.

PETER. The Archbishop hurled forth direr curses than the monks.

KING SKULE. Ah, then I see that I still have trusty men. You here, who should have been the first to serve me, stood terrified and shrank back—but down in the crowd have I friends who for my sake fear not to take so great a sin upon their souls.

PETER. You have not one trusty man who dared to take the sin upon him.

KING SKULE. Almighty God! has then a miracle come to pass? Who bore out the holy thing?

PETER. I, my father!

KING SKULE. [*With a shriek.*] You!

THE MEN. [*Shrink back appalled.*] Church-robber!

[PAUL FLIDA, BAARD BRATTE, *and one or two others go out.*

PETER. The deed had to be done. No man's faith is sure ere homage be lawfully done to you. I begged, I besought the monks; it availed not. Then I broke open the church door; none dared to follow me. I sprang up to the high altar, gripped the handle, and pressed hard with my knees; 'twas as though an unseen power gave me more than human strength. The shrine came loose, I dragged it after me down the nave, while the ban moaned like a

storm high up under the vaultings. I dragged it out of the church; all fled and shrank from me. When I came to the middle of the courtyard the handle broke; here it is!

[*Holds it aloft.*]

KING SKULE. [*Quietly, appalled.*] Church-robber.

PETER. For your sake; for the sake of your great king's-thought! You will wipe out the sin; all that is evil you will wipe away. Light and peace will follow you; a glorious day will dawn over the land—what matter, then, if there went a storm-night before it?

KING SKULE. There was as 'twere a halo round your head when your mother brought you to me; now I see in its stead the lightnings of the ban.

PETER. Father, father, think not of me; be not afraid for my woe or weal. Is it not your will I have fulfilled?—how can it be accounted to me for a crime?

KING SKULE. I hungered for your faith in me, and your faith has turned to sin.

PETER. [*Wildly.*] For your sake, for your sake! Therefore God dare not deny to blot it out!

KING SKULE. "Pure and blameless," I swore to Ingeborg—and he scoffs at heaven!

PAUL FLIDA. [*Entering.*] All is in uproar! The impious deed has struck terror to your men; they flee into the churches.

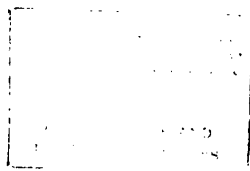
KING SKULE. They shall out; they must out!

BAARD BRATTE. [*Entering.*] The townsfolk have risen against you; they are slaying the Vaarbælgs wherever they find them, on the streets or in the houses!

A MAN-AT-ARMS. [*Entering.*] The Birchlegs are sailing up the river!



HARVEY TRACY WARREN, 1910,
as Peter.



KING SKULE. Summon all my men together! None must fail me here!

PAUL FLIDA. They will not come; they are benumbed with dread.

KING SKULE. [*Despairingly.*] But I cannot fall now! My son must not die with a deadly sin upon his soul!

PETER. Think not of me; 'tis you alone that are to be thought of. Let us make for Indherred; there all men are true to you!

KING SKULE. Ay, to flight! Follow me, whoso would save his life!

BAARD BRATTE. What way?

KING SKULE. Over the bridge!

PAUL FLIDA. All bridges are broken down, my lord.

KING SKULE. Broken down——! All the bridges broken, say you?

PAUL FLIDA. Had you broken them down at Oslo, you might have let them stand at Nidaros.

KING SKULE. We must over the river none the less;—we have our lives and our souls to save! To flight! To flight!

[*He and PETER rush out to the left.*]

BAARD BRATTE. Ay, better so than to fall at the hands of the townfolk and the Birchlegs.

PAUL FLIDA. In God's name, then, to flight!

[*All follow SKULE.*]

The room stands empty for a short time; a distant and confused noise is heard from the streets; then a troop of armed townsmen rushes in by the door on the right.

A TOWNSMAN. Here! He must be here!

ANOTHER. Slay him!

MANY. Slay the church-robber too!

A SINGLE ONE. Go carefully! They may yet bite!

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN. No need; the Birchlegs are already coming up the street.

A TOWNSMAN. [*Entering.*] Too late—King Skule has fled!

MANY. Whither? Whither?

THE NEW-COMER. Into one of the churches, methinks; they are full of the Vaarbælg.

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN. Then let us seek for him; great thanks and reward will King Haakon give to the man who slays Skule.

ANOTHER. Here comes the Birchlegs.

A THIRD. King Haakon himself!

MANY OF THE CROWD. [*Shout.*] Hail to King Haakon Haakonsson!

HAAKON. [*Enters from the right, followed by GREGORIUS JONSSON, DAGFINN THE PEASANT, and many others.*]

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN. [*Kneeling.*] Mercy, my lord! Skule Baardsson bore so hardly on us!

ANOTHER. [*Also kneeling.*] He compelled us, else had we never followed him.

THE FIRST. He seized our goods and forced us to fight for his unrighteous cause.

THE SECOND. Alas, noble lord, he has been a scourge to his friends no less than to his foes.

MANY VOICES. Ay, ay,—Skule Baardsson has been a scourge to the whole land.

DAGFINN. That, at least, is true enough.

HAAKON. With you townsfolk I will speak later; but first there are other things to be thought of. Knows any man where Skule Baardsson is?

MANY. In one of the churches, lord!

HAAKON. Know you that for certain?

THE TOWNSMEN. Ay, there are all the Vaarbælgs.

HAAKON. [*Softly to DAGFINN.*] He must be found; set a watch on all the churches in the town.

DAGFINN. And when he is found, he must straightway be slain.

HAAKON. [*Softly.*] Slain? Dagfinn, Dagfinn, how heavy a deed it seems?

DAGFINN. My lord, you swore it solemnly at Oslo.

HAAKON. And all men in the land will call for his death. [*Turns to GREGORIUS JONSSON and says, unheard by the others.*] Go; you were once his friend; seek him out and prevail on him to fly the land.

GREGORIUS. [*Joyfully.*] You will suffer it, my lord!

HAAKON. For the sake of my gentle, well-beloved wife.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. But if he should not flee? If he will not or cannot?

HAAKON. Then, in God's name, I may not spare him; then must my kingly word be fulfilled. Go!

GREGORIUS JONSSON. I go, and shall do my utmost. Heaven grant I may succeed. [*Goes out by the right.*]

HAAKON. You, Dagfinn, go with trusty men down to the King's ship; you shall conduct the Queen and her child up to Elgesæter convent.

DAGFINN. My lord, think you she will be safe there?

HAAKON. Nowhere safer. The Vaarbælgs have shut themselves up in the churches, and she has besought to be sent thither; her mother is at Elgesæter.

DAGFINN. Ay, ay, that I know.

HAAKON. Greet the Queen most lovingly from me; and greet Lady Ragnhild also. You may tell them that so soon

as the Vaarbælg shall have made submission and been taken to grace, all the bells in Nidaros shall be rung, for a sign that there has come peace in the land once more.—You townsfolk shall reckon with me to-morrow, each according to his misdeeds. *[Goes with his men.]*

THE FIRST TOWNSMAN. Woe upon us to-morrow!

THE SECOND. We have a long reckoning to pay.

THE FIRST. We, who have stood against Haakon so long—who bore our part in acclaiming Skule when he took the kingly title.

THE SECOND. Who gave Skule both ships and war-tribute—who bought all the goods he seized from Haakon's thanes.

THE FIRST. Ay, woe upon us to-morrow.

A TOWNSMAN. *[Rushes in from the left.]* Where is Haakon? Where is the King?

THE FIRST. What would you with him?

THE NEW-COMER. Bring him great and weighty tidings.

MANY. What tidings?

THE NEW-COMER. I tell them to no other than the King himself.

MANY. Ay, tell us, tell us!

THE NEW-COMER. Skule Baardsson is fleeing up toward Elgesæter.

THE FIRST. It cannot be! He is in one of the churches.

THE NEW-COMER. No, no; he and his son crossed over the river in a skiff.

THE FIRST. Ha, then we can save us from Haakon's wrath!

THE SECOND. Ay, let us forthwith give him to know where Skule is.

THE FIRST. Nay, better than that; we will say nought, but ourselves go up to Elgesæter and slay Skule.

THE SECOND. Ay, ay—that will we!

A THIRD. But did not many Vaarbælgss go with him over the river?

THE NEW-COMER. No, there were but few men in the boat.

THE FIRST. We will arm us as best we can. Oh, now are we townsfolk safe enough! Let no man know what we are about; we are enough for the task!—And now, away to Elgesæter.

ALL. [*Softly.*] Ay, away to Elgesæter!

[*They go out to the left, rapidly but cautiously.*]

END OF SCENE FIRST.

SCENE SECOND.

A fir-wood on the hills above Nidaros. It is moonlight, but the night is misty, so that the background is seen indistinctly, and sometimes scarcely at all. Tree-stumps and great boulders lie round about. KING SKULE, PETER, PAUL FLIDA, BAARD BRATTE, and other VAARBÆLGS *come through the wood from the left.*

PETER. Come hither and rest you, my father.

KING SKULE. Ay, let me rest, rest.

[Sinks down beside a stone.]

PETER. How goes it with you?

KING SKULE. I am hungry! I am sick, sick! I see dead men's shadows!

PETER. *[Springing up.]* Help here—bread for the King!

BAARD BRATTE. Here is every man king; for life is at stake. Stand up, Skule Baardsson, if you be king! Lie not there to rule the land.

PETER. If you scoff at my father, I will kill you.

BAARD BRATTE. I shall be killed whatever betides; for me King Haakon will have no grace; for I was his thane, and deserted him for Skule's sake. Think of somewhat that may save us. No deed so desperate but I will risk it now.

A VAARBÆLG. Could we but get over to the convent at Holm?

PAUL FLIDA. Better to Elgesæter.

BAARD BRATTE. [*With a sudden outburst.*] Best of all to go down to Haakon's ship and bear away the King-child.

PAUL FLIDA. Are you distraught?

BAARD BRATTE. No, no; 'tis our one hope, and easy enough to do. The Birchlegs are ransacking every house, and keeping watch on all the churches; when once we have his heir in our power, Haakon must grant us peace, else will his child die with us. Who will go with me to save our lives?

SOME. I! I!

PETER. Mayhap I too; but first must I see my father into safe shelter.

BAARD BRATTE. Come, here goes a short way downwards towards Hlade.

[*He and some others go out to the right.*]

PETER. [*To PAUL FLIDA.*] Let not my father know aught of this; he is soul-sick to-night, we must act for him. Ere daybreak shall the King-child be in our hands. Nay, it cannot be a sin; for my father doomed the child in Oslo. Sooner or later it must die, for it blocks my father's path;—my father has a great king's-thought to carry through; it matters not who or how many fall for its sake. Up, up, King Skule—now is your kingdom saved!

KING SKULE. My kingdom? 'Tis dark, my kingdom—like the angel's that rose against God.

A party of MONKS come from the right.

PETER. [*Softly, to PAUL FLIDA.*] See that my father comes safely thither to the convent of Elgesæter.

PAUL FLIDA. Bethink you that there are Birchlegs at Elgesæter.

PETER. But four men; you may easily deal with them, and once inside the convent walls they will not dare to touch you. I will seek Baard Bratte.

PAUL FLIDA. Nay, do not so!

PETER. Not on the King's ship, but at Elgesæter, must the outlaws save the kingdom for my father.

[Goes quickly out to the right.]

A VAARBÆLG. *[Whispering to another.]* Go you to Elgesæter with Skule?

THE OTHER. Hist; no; the Birchlegs are there!

THE FIRST. Neither will I go; but say nought to the rest.

PAUL FLIDA. And now away, two and two.

A MONK. *[Sitting on a stump behind the rest.]* I will guide you, King Skule.

KING SKULE. Know you the way?

THE MONK. The broad way.

[They go out among the trees, to the right; the fog lifts and the comet shows itself, red and glowing, through the hazy air.]

KING SKULE. Peter, my son——! *[Starts backwards.]*
Ha!

THE MONK. *[Sitting behind him on the stump.]* And here am I!

KING SKULE. Who are you?

THE MONK. An old acquaintance.

KING SKULE. Paler man have I never seen.

THE MONK. But you know me not?

KING SKULE. 'Tis you that are to lead me to Elgesæter.

THE MONK. 'Tis I that will lead you to the throne.

KING SKULE. Can you do that?

THE MONK. I can, if you but will it.

KING SKULE. And by what means?

THE MONK. By the means I have used before;—I will take you up into a high mountain and show you all the glory of the world.

KING SKULE. All the glory of the world have I seen ere now, in dreams of temptation.

THE MONK. 'Twas I that gave you those dreams.

KING SKULE. Who are you?

THE MONK. An envoy from the oldest Pretender in the world.

KING SKULE. From the oldest Pretender in the world?

THE MONK. From the first Earl, who rose against the greatest kingdom, and himself founded a kingdom that shall endure beyond doomsday.

KING SKULE. [*Shrieks.*] Bishop Nicholas!

THE MONK. [*Rising.*] Do you know me now? We were friends of yore,

and 'tis you that have brought me back;
once the self-same galley our fortunes bore,
and we sailed on the self-same tack.

At our parting I quailed, in the gloom and the blast;
for a hawk in his talons had gripped my soul fast;
I besought them to chant and to ply the bell,
and I bought me masses and prayers as well,—
they read fourteen, though I'd paid but for seven;
yet they brought me no nearer the gates of heaven.

KING SKULE. And you come from down yonder——?

THE MONK. Yes, from the kingdom down yonder I'm
faring;

the kingdom men always so much miscall.

I vow 'tis in nowise so bad after all,
and the heat, to my thinking, is never past bearing.

KING SKULE. And it seems you have learnt skald-craft,
old Bagler-chieftain!

THE MONK. Not only skald-craft, but store of Latinity!
Once my Latin was not over strong, you know;
now few can beat it for ease and flow.
To take any station in yonder vicinity,
ay, even to pass at the gate, for credential
a knowledge of Latin is well-nigh essential.
You can't but make progress with so many able
and learned companions each day at the table,—
full fifty ex-popes by my side carouse, and
five hundred cardinals, skalds seven thousand.

KING SKULE. Greet your Master and give him my
thanks for his friendship. Tell him he is the only king who
sends help to Skule the First of Norway.

THE MONK. Hear now, King Skule, what brings me
to you—
my Master's henchmen down there are legion,
and each up here is allotted a region;
they gave Norway to me, as the place I best knew.
Haakon Haakonsson serves not my Master's will;
we hate him, for he is our foeman still—
so he must fall, leaving you at the helm,
the sole possessor of crown and realm.

KING SKULE. Ay, give me the crown! When once I
have that, I will rule so as to buy myself free again.

THE MONK. Ay, that we can always talk of later—
we must seize the time if we'd win the fight.
King Haakon's child sleeps at Elgesæter;
could you once wrap him in the web of night,
then like storm-swept motes will your foes fly routed,
then your victory's sure and your kingship undoubted!

KING SKULE. Think you so surely that the victory were mine?

THE MONK. All men in Norway are sighing for rest;
the king with an heir is the king they love best—
a son to succeed to the throne without wrangling;
for the people are tired of this hundred-years' jangling.
Rouse you, King Skule! one great endeavour!
the foe must perish to-night or never!
See, to the northward how light it has grown,
see how the fog lifts o'er fiord and o'er valley—
there gather noiselessly galley on galley—
hark! men are marching with rumble and drone!
One word of promise, and all is your own—
hundreds of glittering sails on the water,
thousands of warriors hurtling to slaughter.

KING SKULE. What word would you have?

THE MONK. For raising you highest, my one condition
is just that you follow your heart's ambition;
all Norway is yours, to the kingship I'll speed you,
if only you vow that your son shall succeed you!

KING SKULE. [*Raising his hand as if for an oath.*] My
son shall— [*Stops suddenly, and breaks forth in terror.*]
The church-robber! All the might to him! Ha! now I
understand;—you seek for his soul's perdition! Get thee
behind me, get thee behind me! [*Stretches out his arms
to heaven.*] Oh have mercy on me, thou to whom I now
call for help in my sorest need!

[*He falls prone to the earth.*]

THE MONK. Accursed! He's slipped through my
fingers at last—

and I thought of a surety I held him so fast!

But the Light, it seems, had a trick in store

that I knew not of—and the game is o'er.

Well, well; what matters a little delay?

Perpetuum mobile's well under way;

my might is assured through the years and the ages,

the haters of light shall be still in my wages.

[He disappears in the fog among the trees.]

KING SKULE. *[After a short pause, half rises and looks around.]* Where is he, my black comrade? *[Springs up.]*

My guide, my guide, where are you? Gone!—No matter;
now I myself know the way, both to Elgesæter and beyond.

[Goes out to the right.]

END OF SCENE SECOND.

SCENE THIRD.

The courtyard of Elgesæter Convent. To the left lies the chapel, with an entrance from the courtyard; the windows are lighted up. Along the opposite side of the space stretch some lower buildings; in the back, the convent wall with a strong gate, which is locked. It is a clear moonlight night. Three Birchleg Chiefs stand by the gate; MARGRETE, LADY RAGNHILD, and DAGFINN THE PEASANT come out from the chapel.

LADY RAGNHILD. [*Half to herself.*] King Skule had to flee into the church, you say! He, he, a fugitive! begging at the altar for peace—begging for his life mayhap—oh no, no, that could never be; but God will punish you who dared to let it come to this!

MARGRETE. My dear, dear mother, curb yourself; you know not what you say; 'tis your grief that speaks.

LADY RAGNHILD. Think you Haakon Haakonsson dare let his doom be fulfilled if the King should fall into his hands?

DAGFINN. King Haakon himself best knows whether a king's oath can be broken.

LADY RAGNHILD. [*To MARGRETE.*] And this man of blood have you followed in faith and love! Are you your father's child? May the wrath of heaven——!

DAGFINN. Who knocks?

KING SKULE. [*Without.*] A king.

DAGFINN. Skule Baardsson.

LADY RAGNHILD. King Skule.

MARGRETE. My father!

KING SKULE. Open, open!

DAGFINN. We open not here to outlaws.

KING SKULE. 'Tis a king who knocks, I tell you; a king who has no roof over his head; a king whose life is forfeit if he reach not consecrated ground.

MARGRETE. Dagfinn, Dagfinn, 'tis my father!

DAGFINN. [*Goes to the gate and opens a small shutter.*]
Come you with many men to the convent?

KING SKULE. With all the men that were true to me in my need.

DAGFINN. And how many be they?

KING SKULE. Fewer than one.

MARGRETE. He is alone, Dagfinn.

LADY RAGNHILD. Heaven's wrath fall upon you if you deny him sanctuary!

DAGFINN. In God's name, then!

[*He opens the gate; the Birchlegs respectfully uncover their heads.* KING SKULE *enters the courtyard.*]

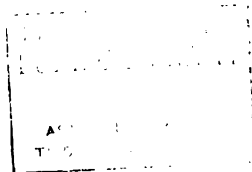
MARGRETE. [*Throwing herself on his neck.*] My father! And not one of all your men had the heart to follow you this night!

KING SKULE. Both monks and spearmen brought me on the way; but they slipped from me one by one, for they knew there were Birchlegs at Elgesæter. Paul Flida was the last to leave me; he came with me to the convent gate; there he gave me his last hand-grip, in memory of the time when there were Vaarbælgs in Norway.

DAGFINN. [*To the Birchlegs.*] Get you in, chieftains, and set you as guards about the King-child; I must to Nidaros to acquaint the King that Skule Baardsson is at Elgesæter; in so weighty a matter 'tis for him to act.



DONALD WALLACE PORTER, 1908,
as Lady Ragnhild.



MARGRETE. Oh, Dagfinn, Dagfinn, have you the heart for that?

DAGFINN. Else should I ill serve King and land. [*To the men.*] Lock the gates after me, watch over the child, and open to none until the King be come. [*Softly to SKULE.*] Farewell, Skule Baardsson—and God grant you a blessed end.

[*Goes out by the gate; the Birchlegs close it after him, and go into the chapel.*]

LADY RAGNHILD. Ay, let Haakon come; I will not loose you. Oh, how pale you are—and aged; you are cold.

KING SKULE. I am not cold—but I am weary, weary.

MARGRETE. Come in then, and rest you——

KING SKULE. Yes, yes; 'twill soon be time to rest. [*Looking at them, much moved.*] Have you loved me so deeply, you two? I sought after happiness abroad, and heeded not the home wherein I might have found it. I pursued after love through sin and guilt, little dreaming that 'twas mine already, in right of God's law and man's. [*With animation.*] When Haakon comes, I will beg grace of him! You gentle, loving women,—oh, but it is fair to live!

SIGRID. [*With an expression of terror.*] Skule, my brother! Woe to you if you stray from the path this night.

[*A loud noise without; immediately afterwards, a knocking at the gate.*]

MARGRETE. Hark, hark! Who comes in such haste?

LADY RAGNHILD. Who knocks at the gate?

VOICES. [*Without.*] Townsfolk from Nidaros! Open! We know that Skule Baardsson is within!

KING SKULE. Ay, he is within; what would ye with him?

NOISY VOICES. [*Without.*] Come out, come out! Death to the evil man!

A SINGLE VOICE. King Haakon doomed him at Oslo.

ANOTHER. 'Tis every man's duty to slay him.

MARGRETE. I command you to depart!

A VOICE. 'Tis Skule Baardsson's daughter, and not the Queen, that speaks thus.

PETER. [*Without, on the right.*] My father, my king! Now will you soon have the victory!

KING SKULE. [*With a shriek.*] He! He!

[*Sinks down upon the church steps.*]

LADY RAGNHILD. Who is it?

A TOWNSMAN. [*Without.*] See, see! the church-robber climbs over the convent roof!

OTHERS. Stone him! Stone him!

PETER. [*Appears on a roof to the right, and jumps down into the yard.*] Well met again, my father!

KING SKULE. [*Looks at him aghast.*] You—I had forgotten you——! Whence come you?

PETER. [*Wildly.*] Where is the King-child?

MARGRETE. The King-child!

KING SKULE. [*Starts up.*] Whence come you, I ask?

PETER. From Hladehammer; I have given Baard Bratte and the Vaarbælgs to know that the King-child lies at Elgesæter to-night.

MARGRETE. O God!

KING SKULE. You have done that! And now——?

PETER. He is gathering together his men, and they are hasting up to the convent.—Where is the King-child, woman?

MARGRETE. [*Who has placed herself before the church door.*] He sleeps in the sacristy!

PETER. 'Twere the same if he slept on the altar! I have dragged out St. Olaf's shrine—I fear not to drag out the King-child as well.

LADY RAGNHILD. [*Calls to SKULE.*] And he it is you have loved so deeply!

MARGRETE. Father, father! How could you forget us all for his sake?

KING SKULE. He was pure as a lamb of God when the penitent woman gave him to me;—'tis his faith in me has made him what he now is.

PETER. [*Without heeding him.*] The child must out! Slay it, slay it in the Queen's arms,—that was King Skule's word in Oslo!

MARGRETE. Oh shame, oh shame!

PETER. A saint might do it unsinning, at my father's command! My father is King; for the great king's-thought is his!

TOWNSMEN. [*Knocking at the gate.*] Open! Come out, you and the church-robber, else will we burn the convent down!

KING SKULE. [*As if seized by a strong resolution.*] The great king's-thought! 'Tis that has poisoned your young loving soul! Pure and blameless I was to give you back; 'tis faith in me that drives you thus wildly from crime to crime, from deadly sin to deadly sin! Oh, but I can save you yet: I can save us all! [*Calls toward the background.*] Wait, wait, ye townsmen without there: I come!

MARGRETE. [*Seizing his hand in terror.*] My father! what would you do?

KING SKULE. [*Firmly and forcibly, to PETER.*] You saw in me the heaven-chosen one,—him who should do the great king's-work in the land. Look at me better, misguided boy! The rags of kingship I have decked myself withal, they were borrowed and stolen—now I put them off me, one by one.

PETER. [*In dread.*] My great, my noble father, speak not thus!

KING SKULE. The king's-thought is Haakon's, not mine; to him alone has the Lord granted the power that can act it out. You have believed in a lie; turn from me, and save your soul.

PETER. [*In a broken voice.*] The king's-thought is Haakon's!

KING SKULE. I yearned to be the greatest in the land. My God! my God! behold, I abase myself before thee, and stand as the least of all men.

PETER. Take me from the earth, O Lord! Punish me for all my sin; but take me from the earth; for here am I homeless now! [*Sinks down upon the church steps.*]

KING SKULE. I had a friend who bled for me at Oslo. He said: A man can die for another's life-work; but if he is to go on living, he must live for his own.—I have no life-work to live for, neither can I live for Haakon's,—but I can die for it. There are men born to live, and men born to die. My desire was ever thitherward where God's finger pointed not the way for me; therefore I never saw my path clear, till now. My peaceful home-life have I wrecked; I can never win it back again. My sins against Haakon I can atone by freeing him from a kingly duty which must have parted him from his dearest treasure. The townsfolk stand without; I will not wait for King

Haakon! I must into the mighty church roofed with the vault of stars, and 'tis the King of Kings I must implore for grace and mercy over all my life-work. Greet King Haakon from me; tell him that even in my last hour I know not whether he be king-born; but this I know of a surety: he it is whom God has chosen.

SIGRID. I will bear him your greeting.

KING SKULE. And yet another greeting must you bear. There dwells a penitent woman in the north, in Halogaland; tell her that her son has gone before; he went with me when there was great danger for his soul.

SIGRID. That will I. [*Points towards the background.*] Hark! they are breaking the lock!

KING SKULE. [*Points towards the chapel.*] Hark! they are singing loud to God of salvation and peace!

SIGRID. Hark again! All the bells in Nidaros are ringing——!

KING SKULE. [*Smiles mournfully.*] They are ringing a king to his grave.

SIGRID. Nay, nay, they ring for your true crowning! Farewell, my brother, let the purple robe of blood flow wide over your shoulders; under it may all sin be hidden! Go forth, go into the great church and take the crown of life.

[*Hastens into the chapel.*]

[*Chanting and bell-ringing continue during what follow.*]

VOICES. [*Outside the gate.*] The lock has burst! Force us not to break the peace of the church!

KING SKULE. I come.

THE TOWNSMEN. And the church-robber must come too.

KING SKULE. Ay, the church-robber shall come too.
[*Goes over to PETER.*] My son, are you ready?

PETER. Ay, father, I am ready.

KING SKULE. [*Looks upwards.*] O God, I am a poor man, I have but my life to give; but take that, and keep watch over Haakon's great king's-thought.—See now, give me your hand.

PETER. Here is my hand, father.

KING SKULE. And fear not for that which is now to come.

PETER. Nay, father, I fear not, when I go with you.

KING SKULE. A safer way have we two never trodden together. [*He opens the gate; the TOWNSMEN stand without with upraised weapons.*] Here are we; we come of our own free will;—but strike him not in the face.

[*They pass out, hand in hand; the gate glides to.*

A VOICE. Aim not, spare not;—strike them where ye can.

KING SKULE'S VOICE. 'Tis base to deal thus with chieftains.

[*A short noise of weapons; then a heavy fall is heard; all is still for a moment.*

A VOICE. They are dead, both of them!

[*The KING's horn sounds.*

ANOTHER VOICE. There comes King Haakon with all his guard!

THE CROWD. Hail! Haakon Haakonsson; now have you no longer any foemen.

GREGORIUS JONSSON. [*Stops a little before the corpses.*]
So I have come too late! [*Enters the convent yard.*]

DAGFINN. It had been ill for Norway had you come sooner. [*Calls out.*] In here, King Haakon!

HAAKON. [*Stopping.*] The body lies in my way!

DAGFINN. If Haakon Haakonsson would go forward, he must pass over Skule Baardsson's body!

HAAKON. In God's name then!

[*Steps over the corpse and comes in.*]

DAGFINN. At last you can set about your king's-work with free hands. In there are those you love; in Nidaros they are ringing in peace in the land; and yonder he lies who was your direst foe.

HAAKON. All men misjudged him, reading not his secret.

DAGFINN. His secret?

HAAKON. [*Seizes him by the arm, and says softly.*]
Skule Baardsson was God's step-child on earth; that was the secret.

[*The song of the women is heard more loudly from the chapel; all the bells are still ringing in Nidaros.*]

THE END.

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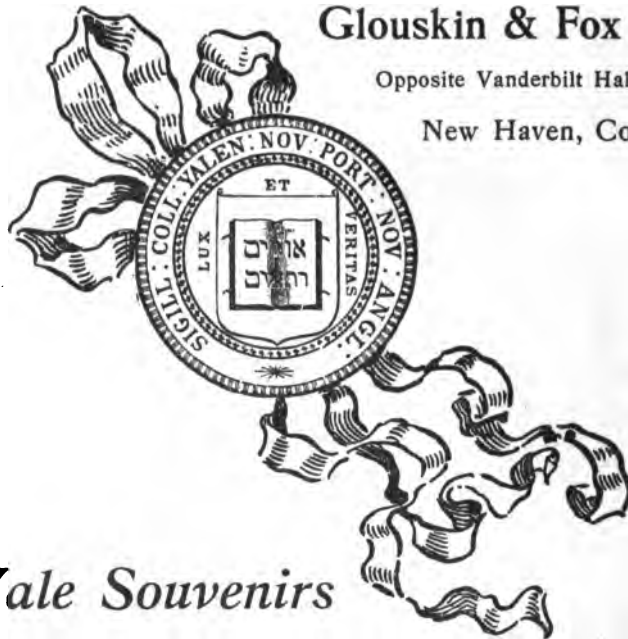
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